# CROSS SECTION

## 1947

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*A collection of*
*new American writing*
*edited by*
*EDWIN SEAVER*

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# *CONTENTS*

FOREWORD by Edwin Seaver ix

ONE HEART, IN CAMBRIDGE by Hamlen Hunt 3

THE LORD'S DAY by J. F. Powers 13

BALLET OF THE BOWIE KNIVES by William March 20

CONFETTI NIGHT by Betty Baur 28

O PRAIRIE GIRL, BE LONELY by Meridel LeSueur 40

ANOTHER LANGUAGE by Charles A. Fenton 72

ST. BARNABAS AND ST. JUDE by Constance Pultz 80

THREE POEMS by Francis C. Cook 89

THE GOATS OF JUAN FERNANDEZ
by Coleman Rosenberger 92

TWO POEMS by M. H. Constable 93

THREE POEMS by Thomas McGrath 95

IN DARKNESS AND CONFUSION by Ann Petry 98

THE CHURCH by Robert Lowry 129

THE REEF by Basil Heatter 140

PIG OF THE SEA by Bogart Carlaw 151

THE WAY THINGS ARE by Sam Elkin 159

THE BALLAD OF THE NAMELESS ONE
by Robert E. Hayden 183

WHO COULD HAVE BEEN A MAN by Vincent Ferrini 184

TWO POEMS by Don Gifford 188

THESE WHO SHORN RETURN by Belle Turnbull 190

TWO POEMS by Edith Conklin 191

BLUE AERIAL by James Turner Jackson 194

THE NAMES ON MONUMENTS by Morton Fineman 208

SINGLE EXIT by Nelson Algren 217

REFUGEE by Ellen Nielsen 225

*From* THE FREE AND THE LONELY by Leonard Ehrlich 231

TWO POEMS by Oliver Hale 261

POEM by Alan Dugan 263

HOMEGOING, DOWN MOUNTAIN by Will Gibson 264

THE ARRIVAL by Eleanor Wells 265

FIVE POEMS by George W. John 267

HAVING A TIME by Henry C. Meyer 269

THE NEWBORN by Theodore Wilson 281

THE PEOPLE ON THE SCREENED PORCH
by David Cornel DeJong 288

PAULO by George H. Taylor 297

THE PILGRIM HEART by Prudencio de Pereda 311

THE LIBERATION by Marjorie Stengel 340

THE BROTHERS by Jo Sinclair 352

EAT DUSTY BREAD by Teo Savory 361

YOUNG HERBERT by Hugh Rockwell 373

TWO POEMS by A. M. Krich 383

TWO POEMS by Byron Vazakas 388

TWO POEMS by Harold Norse 391

ODE TO A FASHION BAZAAR by Jane Mayhall 393

LAST MAN ON A ROCK by Ralph Peterson 395

HOMESICK FOR A HANGING by James Cox 403

WATER FRONT by Wayne Ellson 417

SKIN by George Sturtevant 427

TALES FROM THE VIENNA WOODS by Hilde Abel 437

CONFESSIONAL by Richard W. Erickson 458

STALIES by Terry Morris 473

THE OTHER ONE by Jean Garrigue 482

*Cross Section 1947* is the third in the annual *Cross Section* series, edited by Edwin Seaver, devoted to new American writing previously unpublished. The volumes contain short stories, novelettes, poems and essays by young American writers. Among the contributors to *Cross Section* (1944) and *Cross Section 1945* were:

Hilde Abel, Betty Baur, Jane Bowles, Millen Brand, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ralph Ellison, Morton Fineman, Jean Garrigue, Brendan Gill, Robert E. Hayden, Langston Hughes, Shirley Jackson, Jane Mayhall, Arthur Miller, Edita Morris, Paul Peters, Prudencio de Pereda, Leonard Wallace Robinson, Nancy Wilson Ross, Norman Rosten, Gladys Schmitt, Isidor Schneider, Marjorie Stengel, Jesse Stuart, Oscar Williams, Ira Wolfert, Richard Wright and Len Zinberg.

# *FOREWORD*

THIS IS *the third volume in the annual series devoted to new American writing. The series was begun in 1944, and in the normal chronology the present book should be dated 1946. However, the number of manuscripts submitted was so unexpectedly and indeed overwhelmingly large, it was impossible to complete the task of reading and selection in time for publication before the first of the new year. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to title this third yearbook of American writing* Cross Section 1947.

*It is gratifying to report that the general level of the manuscripts received was definitely higher than in previous years. By this I do not mean merely that better writers were sending me better stories, better poems. I mean that the manuscripts as a whole, many of those rejected as well as those accepted, gave an over-all impression of heightened seriousness and greater maturity, of fresh vitality and a firmer grasp of the aesthetic means; one sensed that our younger writers were freeing themselves from the literary influences of the recent past, were reaching out toward new orientations.*

*If this is so then it augurs well for the books of tomorrow, for certainly the year that has passed gave one little cause for feeling optimistic about American letters; it was pretty much ebb tide all the way. It will be said that this was inevitable, coming so soon after the war, although why a war of liberation should produce a cultural lag surely needs some explaining. But perhaps it was not just an off year, with our literature piddling along in the backwash of the conflict. Perhaps it was a period of hiatus when the sun had already set on our between-the-wars generation of writers and no author or group of authors of comparable significance were yet ready to take their place. One had the feeling that this*

*generation had completed their work, had in fact completed it even before the onset of the war. Some of them would continue to write, of course, but there was reason to doubt if they would add anything new or vital to what they had already accomplished. As if to verify this, we were presented with admirable little anthologies of their works, each a monument to the past, so that one could not very well tell the difference between Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Wolfe dead, and Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck living.*

*It is well to recall at this time the political offensive launched against our best writers at the beginning of the war by what James Farrell called "the league of frightened Philistines." According to Archibald MacLeish and Van Wyck Brooks, who led the offensive, authors like Faulkner, Hemingway, Dos Passos and Farrell were a faithless and unpatriotic bunch of "irresponsibles" whose writing had undermined civilization in general and let their country down in particular; their books had so demoralized the American people that we were quite unprepared for the crisis. As Mr. Farrell said: "If this war achieves nothing else, at least it will have saved human civilization from four American novelists." What our moralists wanted us to do, apparently, was to repudiate American between-the-wars literature and create a new literature by fiat, a nationalist, hopeful literature unmotivated by the death impulse and dedicated to the cult of responsibility.*

*Well, the war was fought to a victorious conclusion despite the "irresponsibles"; apparently not as many people had read their books and been corrupted by them as our suddenly official critics supposed. But with the exception of Mr. Farrell's counterblast, no new critics have arisen to repudiate the repudiators, nor have the writers they attacked revealed sufficient vitality to justify the hope of their continued influence. Instead we have recently had the disgusting spectacle of the Hearst press whooping it up for a "healthy" literature and declaring their own kind of war against "filthy books." From Van Wyck Brooks and Archibald MacLeish to the yellow press, from a political attack against the realistic tradition of American literature to the campaign for a Hays office for books—how far we have progressed in the wrong direction!*

*Meanwhile, the vacuum is being filled by the smart boys in the smart money, the cake-and-penny writers who want their compromise and their integrity too. We have reversed Oscar Wilde's definition of a cynic*

*as a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. Our cynics today know the value of everything and the price of nothing. A particularly blatant example of such cynicism may be seen in* The Hucksters, *by Frederic Wakeman, where the hero is so coyly sardonic about being "sincere" in business that when it comes to being sincere in love he is just ridiculous. Opportunism, sensationalism, venality seem to be the order of the day, with authors writing with an eye to the main chance, and publishers intent on making a killing, so that even an author like Somerset Maugham, who one would think had arrived at the age of discretion, will sign his name to a quickie like* Then and Now *and permit a novel allegedly about Machiavelli and his times to be advertised like the latest bit of servant girl fiction, which in fact it is.*

*We have multiplied figures to show that never before in our history have so many books been distributed among so many people, as if you could measure a culture quantitatively. But why doesn't someone make a qualitative analysis of American writing and publishing and reading today as compared, for instance, with the time of the Civil War? Are better books being written today and being read by more people in proportion to the population? Are the publishers' back lists in as healthy or a healthier state, and are the publishers placing a comparable emphasis on the great books of the past? Are more new titles being issued now than then, again proportionately? Such an analysis might be very revealing as we traced the course of American literature from the golden age to the gilded age, to what may be the beginning of the age of brass if we lack the creative will to fashion it otherwise.*

*Our literature today suffers from a lack of critical leadership, from a paucity of ideas and ideals. I suppose it is of some significance that in the more than 7000 manuscripts submitted for this year's* Cross Section *there were less than a dozen critical essays, and among these none that attempted to be anything other than a more or less glorified book review. Nor outside of* Cross Section *did I find any example of the large generative essay that sums up a period or formulates a tendency or defines an objective—such an essay, for example, as Van Wyck Brooks'* America's Coming of Age *(Mr. Brooks was once a critic before he went in for making patchwork quilts out of the remnants in the American attic), or the* Myth of Sisyphus, *by Albert Camus. The surest sign of the crisis in American letters today is the almost complete lack of an authoritative criticism.*

*Lacking critical leadership and guidance from the older generation, our young writers must create their own critics as well as storytellers, novelists and poets. This is a large order in a world that seems to be suffering from a kind of universal schizophrenia, where the present is uncertain and the future dubious. But with our elders still trying to play a new game with the old deck of cards, we have nowhere to turn but to the young.*

EDWIN SEAVER

August 15, 1946

CROSS SECTION 1947

# ONE HEART, IN CAMBRIDGE

by

Hamlen Hunt

The house was big and square and white-painted, like many in Cambridge, but the wide front door was painted old rose, out of all tradition in the neighborhood. From the street you could not see the long wing which had been built onto the original square dwelling. There was a deep front yard with a picket fence and a dozen beautiful tall old elms that had escaped the blight. Mrs. Sanderson still regretted having had to cut out all the red-currant bushes: New England, in trying to save its trees, had interfered with many a great-grandmother's garden plan, done on Bristol board in faint water tints, and now there were no more red-currant or gooseberry bushes in Cambridge gardens, among roses in variety, and phlox, and flowering quince.

But the fact that there was a long wing added to the square house, yet added in such a separate way that there were really two houses lightly joined by a wall, was very important. There were two houses and two sets of lives the Sandersons used—one for Louis Amory Sanderson and his wife, the other for the children and the help.

Once all the Sandersons had lived in the square white house, Louis Amory, the composer, his wife, Dorothy, and the two little girls, Louisa and Amory. But that was before Louis Amory was discovered to have his serious heart ailment. When he became a miracle in modern science and medicine, just by being alive, while he was at the same time one of the well-known and respected young American moderns in music, then things changed abruptly. Dorothy had the wing built, and put into it the

little girls and their governess and the housekeeper and maids, to live quietly and at distance from their father and mother.

It was curious that Louis Amory—his wife called him that as if the names were hyphenated, and as though one single name were not good enough for him—should be doubly famous, once in music, once in medical annals. His music was played in many countries, but the X rays of his heart were also internationally known.

By rights he should not have been alive—that was what made him different from other people, and even his little girls understood that after a while, as they came to ages of reason like seven and nine. His heart was so big, and so strangely shaped, so out of place, the veins and arteries leading to and from what he jocularly called "the old pump"—trying to be sporting about it—labored under such handicaps, that he should have been dead.

"Hard to believe these X rays, isn't it?" one doctor would say to another. "And look at this EKG reading—taken only last week! And the man's alive!"

It was Dorothy who kept him alive. He knew it, the medical world knew it, and the musical world knew it, and everybody appreciated her. She gave her life for Louis Amory to use: he was kept alive by her strength, her will, her devotion, and her tireless service. She loved him almost terribly: as if she had created him. She adored him. She admired him. She thought his music was the finest ever written. All her abnegation had reason because she understood his greatness: his life, she told herself, was worth a dozen mediocre lives of those around him.

At the beginning, before Louis Amory became so ill, the Sandersons lived a not-unusual Cambridge existence. And this was what it was like:

The household was cared for by several colored women who went home to Central Square at night. The house was curiously divided into rooms on different levels, there were steps up and steps down and small, abrupt staircases here and there; but the rooms were charming, the windows were tall, and there were many fireplaces. The children went to nursery school, and their mother bought them five-toed moccasins and striped jerseys and overalls at Miss Cannon's near the Square. Louis worked in the second-story music room that looked on to a thicket that was actually part of some Harvard dormitory's back yard.

They entertained by having six or eight to dinner every several weeks, and lit candles, and served cocktails in quite small iridescent glasses,

and there was cold wine with the dinner of duck and substantial incidentals. The ducks came from Sage's Market, the vegetables from a garden at one side of the house, and Dorothy herself made the apricot whip for dessert.

On Sundays they went walking, either as a family—that meant a short walk in the neighborhood, because of the children, and perhaps ice cream at St. Clair's—or just Dorothy and Louis Amory by themselves went walking in the Blue Hills.

Of course, they had seats at Symphony, and because Louis made his own working hours, they went to the Friday-afternoon concerts and were part of that rather oddly composed club of music listeners who attend on Fridays—ladies with feather toques and draped satin dresses, students, and a few rather elderly gentlemen, retired merchants or bankers or keepers of the family estates and fortunes.

Dorothy had been a rather thin girl and young woman, and early in the marriage she had interests and pleasures of her own. She lunched with other women friends in town, kept up with the new books, once in a great while went to New York and bought herself some clothes. But still her greatest pleasure—though that is not the exact word for the sentiment she entertained for music, it was more a sacred ritual, a mark of credit on the spiritual side of the ledger, a pleasure in the sense she liked to hear it, but joy was hardly included in the word—was to go to hear music with Louis Amory. They heard it at Sanders Theatre, at Symphony, or Jordan Hall, and of course at all the private musicales that Boston and Cambridge society arranged.

It was only after Louis Amory's first severe heart attack, when Dorothy was told that it was a matter of little time before he died of another like it, that she changed in aspirations and appearance. Her one ambition became to keep Louis Amory alive and with her, at whatever cost: and she began to grow heavy, like an anchor. In time, after eight years, she was quite a thick, solid figure, not fat so much as impenetrable and massive, and she swathed herself in artistic materials and often wore white sneakers, and cut her hair herself, taking the tips of her ears as the marker for where the scissors were to clip.

After that first heart attack, which made it plain that Louis Amory was at best an invalid, at worst a dying musician with too little of his music yet written down, the Sandersons became an eccentric family. That is, rather more eccentric than other old Cambridge families, which not infrequently include one old lady living alone in an enormous house,

who reads Latin all night by candlelight, with her feet on the table, and books spilling beside her on the floor.

Dorothy told her mother, old Mrs. Hilliard, "I only live to keep Louis Amory alive now, Mother, and nothing—nothing else in the world—matters so much to me. I've had the wing built while Louis Amory had to be in the hospital, but I never want him to go back into a hospital. I can do whatever they would do there for him. We can buy whatever equipment we need, and this is his home. A man has a right to die at home. I'm putting the children over in the wing and I've hired some people to take care of them, but I will wait on Louis Amory myself. It will take all my time. I have no other interest. I shall run my life and my household as I please."

"But you do have Louisa and baby Amory to think about," her mother said crisply. Had she carried a cane like some of her contemporaries, she would have pounded it on the floor, but as it was, all she did was to adjust her hearing device so that Dorothy's own voice and statements reverberated harshly back to her across the living room. "They are your children, and they have rights, I suppose. What is more, Louisa adores you. Not her father. You."

"I must do things my own way, Mother," Dorothy said.

She meant it, and she did. She ruthlessly cut herself off from all social intercourse, and removed herself from the web of former living. She saw the girls every day, but remotely, they were in charge of someone else, and their social lives were attended to by their irritated grandmother and by various aunts. They went to dreary birthday parties where they never seemed to wear quite the right thing, since no one person shopped for them any longer. When the children were sick, Dorothy sometimes went and sat by their bedsides briefly, or read aloud to them, but she was fidgety, and they often cried agonizedly until she left, they were so strange with her, and besides, they had fevers, did they not? Sometimes, after a visit from her mother, Louisa would cry for hours.

Louis Amory, merely by having a large and fault-filled heart, became a famous figure aside from his music, but it was Dorothy, their mother, who was the romantic figure to the little girls, just the same. They went and called on their dark-eyed, gasping father now and then, and he rather yearned after them, but he was habituated in illness now, and he tired quickly, and the little girls soon seemed untidy, noisy, and restless. Sometimes he played some of his new asymmetric music for them, and they listened politely, sitting charmingly on brocaded hassocks, and then

said, "Good-by now, Daddy. We must go. It is suppertime. We will see you tomorrow, if you are feeling well enough."

But from the windows of their expansive enough quarters in the wing —the servants, of course, called it the Slave Quarters—the children yearned after Dorothy, who paid them almost no attention at all.

"Look—I see Mother, lighting Daddy's lamp," Louisa would whisper to Amory, as they stood side by side at the window. They had had their early supper, and the servants were downstairs having theirs—this was their playtime before going to sleep. But they rarely played. It was their time, by private childhood decision, for watching their mother and father, those remote personages from whom they were removed by circumstances as wide and deep as any moat. "It must be time for his supper, perhaps," Louisa said, for she knew the schedule, too, by watching. "He has been pretty well today. He is sitting up in the wing chair to eat. Mother is going to sit at the little table near him, and eat, too. I think they are having cold chicken and curried rice, and strawberry mousse—the cook told me. Unless Daddy changed his mind at the last minute and wanted something else."

"What is Mother doing now?" Amory whispered back, holding to her older sister's corduroy overalls.

"She is bending over Daddy, tucking in his napkin," said Louisa. "He has already had his medicine. He never fusses, like we do."

No, he never did. He was a slave to his doctors and his wife: he had to be, to live, and he clung even to this circumscribed and attenuated life of the second floor from which he never descended because stairs were forbidden him. Dorothy had considered an electric elevator, but had decided against it, because it might mean that Louis Amory would go downstairs too often, and become tired, and die the sooner.

Her world and Louis Amory's was the second floor, composed of music room, sitting room, Louis Amory's bedroom, kitchen, and bath. Dorothy slept in a small cot at the foot of the great four-poster bed in which her husband rested, and, as the room was filled with his books, his musical papers, his medicines, and clothes and bed and special chairs, she hung her clothes on hooks behind curtains, anywhere there was room.

Louisa often woke at night and saw her mother moving silently, giving her husband medicine, or, if he slept, restlessly walking herself, or reading, or hastily scratching away at necessary letters. She had no personal correspondence of her own, but of course Louis Amory received a great many letters, or she did, about him. There were letters from doc-

tors all over the world, inquiring about his case, and these she forwarded to the doctors in attendance, chiefly two at the Massachusetts General, a Dr. Brandywine and a Dr. Port, which made a rather tepid little pleasantry. There were letters from musicians, chiefly discussing music, and these she read aloud to Louis Amory, and they talked over at length—it was one of their chief recreations. Then she wrote answers, sometimes from his dictation, more usually saying what he had said in her own words. She came to have a style of her own that was quite famous. Frenchmen in Paris would look eagerly at the envelope and say, "Ah! From Dorothy Sanderson!"

She became a good secretary for Louis Amory, but she could not will herself into being as musical as he. She could read music, and that helped him, and she could play the piano a little, not nearly well enough: and her chief remaining jealousy was for the hours when Louis Amory listened to Symphony over the radio, or, rarely, when a quartet of friends, who were in the Symphony, came over and played for him. Sometimes they did his music. Then Dorothy was no longer omnipotent, but became only a heavy, shabby, eccentric wife, unwelcoming of visitors, rather like a household nurse.

She had her rewards in life, of course. Louis Amory depended on her utterly. The doctors knew her well and discussed her husband's heart with her. She tried to augment her medical knowledge, as she did her musical knowledge, with fierce forced reading on long, wakeful nights when Louis Amory had been sedated into sleep, and she, indoors all day, inactive in any large way, was a porcupine of nerves. She knew the shape of Louis Amory's heart, and where the chief flaws in the structure were. She knew his monthly EKG readings, every sharp peak and fluctuation. She knew his good months and his bad ones. She fought off attacks, and when one came on despite her, she cut it short with every means at her hand, before she even had time to phone one of his doctors.

"That was right, Mrs. Sanderson," Dr. Brandywine said, one evening. "You did the correct thing at the essential time."

"Thank you," she said, without smiling or nodding. She had not only lost all humor, but all sense of social exchange, or grace, in conversation. She said what was necessary. She told people. She discussed. But she never talked any more, except to Louis Amory, and with him she was a passionate and interesting conversationalist—his only one, except for the rare visitor, medical or musical, who was admitted to the second floor. "I know his case so well," she informed Dr. Brandywine.

As the years went by, there was plenty for the little girls to see from their windows, and what they saw was much more reality than what went on otherwise. They were indifferent about school, nurses, and playmates, but they learned to identify musical personages who came to call on Louis Amory, and they knew the doctors, and they had their dream that someday their mother would notice them. Louisa still yearned after her. They told each other a perpetual story in which the mother one day said, "Children, let us go on board a boat, a lovely big steamer, and sail away," or "Come, children, we are going to have a picnic by a lighthouse."

Then the drama quickened, as Louis Amory's heart grew less able to do its work. He stayed in bed, or lay on a sofa, and rarely moved about. His visitors became fewer in music and more numerous in medicine, and his own two doctors paid several calls a day. Dorothy became frozen in her resolve to keep her husband alive, and there was less communication than ever between square house and wing. The cook sometimes went over with trays, but Dorothy warmed bouillon and milk herself over an electric plate, and made herself coffee which she drank endlessly, in a chain of cups.

Dorothy wrote frantically, sending out messages about Louis Amory all over the world, as though words could make people think of him, and thoughts help tie him to life. Every day a batch of letters went out of the house, written in her scrawled hand, which grew more distraught as months passed. Sometimes Louisa and Amory were allowed to drop these letters into the mail slot at the post office.

"Mother writes a great deal, doesn't she?" Louisa said. "I wish she would write me a letter someday."

"How silly," said nurse, with that false lift to her voice. "She lives right in the same house—why should she write to you?"

Louisa said, "You know perfectly well it's a different house."

"Grandma sends us postcards in the summertime, from Maine," Amory said.

Then the lights upstairs in the square house never went out, and every hour it was a question whether Louis Amory would be alive the next hour. A great many doctors came, and often left saying, "Of course, he has no right to be alive now—it's astonishing." Or, "She's holding him by sheer will, I sometimes think. We don't know all of everything in medicine, not by any means."

Perhaps Dorothy's will weakened for an instant one day, or perhaps

she dozed off in weariness. Anyway, Louis Amory died, eight or nine years after the first attack which should have killed him, of another like it.

"I expected it," Dorothy said tensely. "It was wonderful to have had him so long. He was a great man, and I helped him to keep alive. I have that to comfort me. And the music he wrote in those years will never die."

The little girls were stricken with new yearning, not for their father who lay dead in the square house, but for their mother. Dorothy sent them only one message.

"They are not to come to the funeral," she said. Trying to soften it, perhaps, she added, "They are too young."

Her mother said, "You should allow them to go. Children can take strong emotion, and death is one more new fact for a child. A funeral is an occasion, a memorable one, hardly sad for your two especially. Later they will want to have seen Louis Amory's funeral."

"I won't have them there," said Dorothy, and her face wrenched. "Perhaps I neglected him at the beginning, before I understood," she said. "If I had known, I never would have had children."

"Well, you do have them," said her mother. "Now you will begin to realize it. Let them go to their father's funeral."

"No," said Dorothy.

But the afternoon before the funeral something did happen which the little girls could always remember. Of course, it had all been arranged far ahead of time, with Louis Amory himself signing a paper, and Dorothy agreeing.

Dr. Brandywine got out of his car and walked slowly toward the rose-colored front door. The little girls watched carefully through the window. The yard was wet and a light rain still fell, so that the trees were heavy and dark, and they would not be sent out for a walk, even if anyone had remembered them. The door opened, the little girls caught a glimpse of their mother's Paisley skirt, her striped surah blouse, the scarf around her head, and her white tennis shoes, turned up at the toes a little—they were too big, they were, indeed, an old pair that had belonged to young Louis Amory Sanderson when he was an undergraduate and played tennis at Harvard. Then the door closed.

"We must watch," Louisa whispered. "It is very important."

"Why?" Amory asked.

"Because," said Louisa.

She did not say because now it might all be ended and their mother might let them into her house once more.

After a long time Dr. Brandywine came out again, still with two black medical bags, one tucked under his right arm, one in his hand.

"Good-by, Dorothy," he said to Mrs. Sanderson. "Of course, I will see you tomorrow, at the chapel."

The little girls knew quite well that their father's heart was in the square black bag. They watched it leave house and front yard forever, and the rosy door close after it.

When they looked over at the other house later, as usual, their mother, a dark, solid figure, was still staring out of the second-floor window. They watched until they could not see her any longer, for night came, and she did not light any lights.

Even after the funeral, as the days went by, Louisa kept in tension, waiting for the passionate affair of the mother, the father, the music, and the vanished heart to end, waiting for her mother to come.

Someone said the estate was being put in order, then that their mother was ill, then that she was better. Someone said she had given away Louis Amory's clothes, and that it was a good sign. But still she did not send for her little girls.

And one day as Louisa and Amory looked out of the window, they saw their mother dressed for going out—which meant she had added a curious old straw hat to the rest of her costume. She now dressed so oddly she even drew glances on Cambridge streets. She stood in the yard, holding a heavyheaded cane that had been Louis Amory's.

"I am going to a lecture on Louis Amory's heart," she said, over her shoulder to the maid. "I won't be back until quite late."

She never glanced up at the little girls, and after that she began the rest of her dedicated life. She went to every lecture on Louis Amory's heart disease—the doctors let her know when they were to be given, out of respect to her devotion and care and knowledge of the case. From there she branched out to attend other medical lectures, sitting in the front row like a vengeful goddess.

"Mind your words," she seemed to say. "Louis Amory is dead, for all you did."

But Louisa remembered the night when she felt her own heart leave the house forever: when she gave up hope of ever having her mother.

There was talk of some of Louis Amory's music being played by the London Symphony the next spring, and Dorothy was going over for

that, and to hear some lectures on the heart that were to be given by Dr. Brandywine before some London medical group. The window of the second-floor music room was open, and, as it was a warm autumn evening, the children's windows were open, too. They heard the music and the low voices and then, more clearly, they heard Dorothy Sanderson say, "I devoted my life to my husband while he lived, and he is still alive to me. Every week I go and pay a visit to his heart. It is well preserved, and it speaks to me, just as this music does—you hear?"

Then the music began again, strangely and hesitantly, as their mother always played it, and Louisa jumped out of bed, weeping, and closed her window.

# THE LORD'S DAY

by

J. F. Powers

*For S. M.*

The trees had the bad luck to be born mulberry and to attract bees. It was not the first time, Father said, so you could not say he was being unfair. It was, in fact, the second time that a bee had come up and stung him on the front porch. What if it had been a wasp? How did he know it was one of the mulberry bees? He knew. That was all, and now, Sister, if you'll just take the others into the house with you we'll get down to work. She had ordered the others into the convent, but had stayed to plead privately for the trees. The three big ones must go. He would spare the small one until such time as it grew up and became a menace.

Adjusting the shade, which let the sun through in withered cracks like the rivers on a map, she peeked out at the baking schoolyard, at the hacked stumps of the three trees. Waves of heat wandered thirstily over the pebbles, led around by the uncertain wind. She could see the figure of Father walking the heat waves, a fat vision returning to the scene of the crime, grabbing the ax away from the janitor—Here, John, let me give her the first lick! And so, possibly fancying himself a hundred years back, the most notable person at the birth of a canal or railroad, and with the children for his amazed audience, he had dealt the first blow. Incredible priest!

She left the room and went downstairs. They were waiting in the parlor. She knew at a glance that one was missing. Besides herself, they were twelve—the apostles. It was the kind of joke they could appreciate, but not to be carried too far, for then one of them must be Judas, which

was not funny. In the same way she, as the leader of the apostles, feared the implication as blasphemous. It was not a very good joke for the convent, but it was fine to tell lay people, to let them know there was life there.

She entered the little chapel off the parlor. Here the rug was thicker and the same wide-board floor made to shine. She knelt for a moment and then, genuflecting in the easy, jointless way that comes from years, she left. Sister Eleanor, the one missing, followed her into the parlor.

"All right, Sisters, let's go." She led them through the sagging house, which daily surpassed itself in gloominess and was only too clean and crowded not to seem haunted, and over the splintery floor rising and sinking underfoot like a raft. She opened the back door and waited for them to pass. She thought of herself as a turnkey releasing them briefly to the sun and then to their common, sudden doom. They proceeded silently across the schoolyard, past the stumps bleeding sap, the bright chips dirtying in the gravel, a few twigs folded in death.

Going under the basketball standards she thought they needed only a raven or two to become gibbets in the burning sun. A pebble lit in the lacings of her shoe. She stopped to free it. She believed she preferred honest dust to manufactured pebbles. Dust lent itself to philosophizing and was easier on the children's knees.

They climbed the cement steps, parting the dish towels on the porch as portieres, and entered the rectory. The towels were dry and the housekeeper would be gone. She sensed a little longing circulate among the sisters as they filed into the kitchen. It was all-modern, the *after* for the *before* they would always have at the convent. She did not care for it, however. It hurt the eyes, like a field of sunny snow. A cockroach turned around and ran the other way on the sink. At least he was not modern.

The dining room was still groggy from Sunday dinner. They drew chairs up to the table in which the housekeeper had inserted extra leaves before taking the afternoon off. The table was covered with the soiled cloth that two of them would be washing tomorrow. They sighed. There, in the middle of the table, in canvas sacks the size of mailbags, were the day's three collections, the ledgers and index cards for recording individual contributions. They sat down to count.

With them all sitting around the table, it seemed the time for her to pray, "Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts . . ."

Sister Antonia, her assistant, seized one of the sacks and emptied it

out on the table. "Come on, you money-changers, dig in!" Sister Antonia rammed her red hands into the pile and leveled it off. "Money, money, money."

"Shall we do what we did last week?" asked Sister Florence. She looked hopefully at Sister Antonia.

"Cubs and White Sox?" said Sister Antonia. "O.K., if it'll make you happy." Sister Antonia dumped out the other sack. The winner would be the one counting the most money. They chose up sides, and changed seats accordingly, leaving Sister Antonia and herself to do the envelopes.

Sister Louise and Sister Paula, who could remember several regimes before hers, and might have been mothers superior themselves, constituted a resistance movement, each in her fashion. Sister Louise went to sleep in a nice, unobtrusive way, chin in wimple. But Sister Paula—Sister Cigar Box to the children, with whom she was *not* a great favorite—stayed awake to grumble and would touch only the coins that appeared old, foreign, or very new to her. She stared long and hard at them while Sister Louise dozed with a handful of sweaty nickels.

It was their way of informing everyone of their disapproval, of letting her know it had not been like this in former times, that Sunday had been a day of rest under other leadership. They were right, she knew too well, and was ashamed that she could not bring herself to make a stand against Father. Fortunately, the two old sisters could not carry the resistance beyond themselves. She left them to Sister Antonia. The others, to make the contest even, divided the dead weight between them. The Cubs got Sister Louise and Sister Paula went with the White Sox.

A horn tooted out in front of the rectory and from his room upstairs young Father shouted, "*Coming!* Tell him I'm coming!" The shout sailed down the stairway and out to Father on the porch.

"He's coming," Father called to the car. "How's your health?"

She could not catch the reply for the noise young Father made running around upstairs. He had on his shower clogs and was such a heavy man.

Finally the ceiling settled and young Father came clattering down the front stairs, dragging his golf clubs behind him. He spoke to Father on the porch.

"Want me home for devotions, Father?"

"Oh, hell, Bill, have a good time. Won't anybody come in weather like this but the nuns. I'll handle it."

"Well—thanks, Boss."

"Look out for that nineteenth hole, that's all I got to say. Have a good time."

"You talked me into it."

Sister Cigar Box dropped a half dollar from an unnecessary height and listened to the ring. "Lead! And I suppose that was that Father O'Mammon in his new machine out waking the dead! I'm on to him. I had him in school."

"O'Hannon, Sister," corrected Sister Antonia.

"Of St. Judas' parish. I know."

"Of St. Jude's, Sister."

"Crazy!"

Father's radio woke up with a roar.

"The symphony!" breathed Sister Charlotte, who gave piano lessons to beginners six days a week.

"It's nice," Sister Cigar Box rasped when Father dialed away from it. "*Was*n't it?"

Now Father was getting the news and disputing with the commentator. "Like hell you say!" Father had the last word and strode into the dining room with his collar off, bristling.

"Good afternoon, Father!" they all sang out.

"We'll have to fight Russia," he said, plunging into the kitchen. She heard him in the refrigerator and could tell that, rather than move things, he squeezed them out. He passed through the dining room, carrying a bottle of beer and a glass.

"Hot," he said to nobody.

The radio came on again. Father listened to an inning of the ball game. "Cubs are still in second place!" he shouted back to them.

"Thank you, Father," said Sister Florence involuntarily.

Sister Cigar Box said, "Humph!"

Now she could tell from the scraping noises that Father was playing himself a game of checkers. Periodically the moves became more rapid, frenzied, then triumphant. He was winning every game.

She asked Sister Eleanor how the map was coming.

"All in except Rhode Island and Tennessee. I don't know what's keeping them." They all knew Sister Eleanor was putting together a map from free road maps she got from the oil companies. She had been unable to get an appropriation from Father for a new one. He said they had a map already and that he had seen it a few years back. She had tried

to tell him it was too old and blurry, that Arizona and Oklahoma, for instance, had been admitted to the Union since its publication. Who cares about them? said Father. Give the kids a general idea, that's all you can do in the grades. Same as you give them catechism. You'd have them all studying Saint Thomas in the Latin.

"How big's it now?" asked Sister Antonia.

"Enormous. We'll have to put it up in sections, I guess. Like the Eastern States, the Middle Atlantic, and so on."

"You could hang it in the gym."

"If Father moved out his workshop."

"Some of the maps don't dovetail when they come from different companies. But you get detail you wouldn't get in a regular map. It's just awkward this way."

Father appeared in the door of the dining room. "How's she look?"

"More envelopes this week, Father," said Sister Antonia.

"Guess that last blast got them. How's the hardware department?"

Three sisters saw each other about to speak, gulped, and said nothing. "It's better, isn't it, Sisters?" inquired Sister Antonia.

"Yes, Sister."

Father came over to the table. "What's this?" He picked up a Chinese coin with a hole in it that Sister Cigar Box had been glad to see earlier. "Well, we don't get so many buttons nowadays, do we?" Father's fingers prowled the money pile sensitively.

"No, Father," said Sister Florence. "One last week, one today." She looked like a small girl who's just spoken her piece.

"One again, huh? Have to tell the ushers to bear down. Here, Sister, you keep this." Father gave the Chinese coin to Sister Cigar Box. "For when you go on the missions."

Sister Cigar Box took the coin from him and said nothing, about the only one not smiling, and put it down a trifle hard on the table.

Father went over to the buffet. "Like apples? Who wants an apple?" He apparently expected them to raise their hands, but did not seem disappointed when no one did. He placed the bowl on the table for them. Three apples on top were real, but the ones underneath were wax and appeared more edible. No one took an apple.

"Don't be bashful," Father said, straying into the kitchen.

She heard him in the refrigerator again.

In a moment he came out of the kitchen with a bottle of beer and a fresh glass, passed quickly through the room, and, hesitating at the

door, turned toward them. "Hot weather," he said. "Makes you sleepy. That's all I got to say." He left them for the porch.

The radio went on again. He had the Catholic Hour for about a minute. "Bum speaker," he explained while dialing. "Else I'd keep it on. I'll try to get it for you next week. They're starting a new series."

"Yes, Father," said Sister Florence, not loud enough to be heard beyond the table.

Sister Cigar Box said, "Humph!"

Father could be heard pouring the beer.

Next he got the Adventures of Phobe Smith, the Phantom Psychiatrist. It was better than the ball game and news. *But, Phobe, if Müller wasn't killed in the plane crash and Mex was really working for British Intelligence, tell me how the heck could Colonel Barnett be a Jap spy and still look like, uh, the real Colonel Barnett? Plastic surgery. Plastic surgery—well, I never! Plus faricasalicasuki. Plus farica—what! Faricasalicasuki—a concentrate, something like our penicillin. And you knew all the time——! That Colonel Barnett's wife Darlene was not . . . unfaithful? Yes! I'm afraid so. Whew!* An organ intervened and Father turned off the radio.

She recorded the last contribution on the last index card. The money was all counted and wrapped in rolls for the bank. The White Sox had won. She told them to wait for her and ventured out on the porch—determined to make up for the afternoon, to show them that she knew perhaps what she was doing.

"Father"—he was resting in an orange and green deck chair—"I wonder if you could come and look at our stove."

Father pried his legs sideways, sat up, and rubbed his eyes. "Today? *Now?*"

She nodded dumbly and forced herself to go through with it. "It's smoking so we can't use it at all." She was ready, if necessary, to mention the old sisters who were used to hot tea.

Father massaged his bald head to rouse himself. He wrinkled the mottled scalp between his hands and it seemed to make a nasty face at her. "Let's go," he said. Evidently he had decided to be peppy, an example to her in time of adversity. He scooped his collar off the radio and let it snap to around his neck. He left it that way, unfastened.

"Father is going to look at the stove," she told them in the dining room. They murmured with pleasure.

Father went first, a little unsteady on stiff legs, not waiting for them.

He passed the stumps in the yard with satisfaction, she thought. "Whyn't you ask John to look at it yesterday?" he demanded over his shoulder.

She tried to gain a step on him, but he was going too fast, wobbling in a straight line like a runaway trolley. "I thought you'd know more about it, Father," she lied, ashamed the others could hear. John, looking at it, had shaken his head. Do we need a new one, John? If you need a stove, Sister, you need a new one.

Father broke into their kitchen, as into a roomful of assassins, and confronted the glowering hulk of iron that was their stove. "Is it dirty or does it just look that way?"

She swallowed her temper, but with such bad grace there was no merit in it, only design. She gave the others such a terrible frown they all disappeared, even Sister Antonia.

Father squinted to read the name on the stove. "That stove cost a lot of money," he said. "They don't make them like that any more." He slapped the pipe going up and out the side of the wall. He gave the draft regulator a twist.

He went to the window and peered out. When he turned around he had the print of the screen on his nose. She would not say anything to distract him. He seemed to be thinking. Then he considered the stove again and appeared to have his mind made up. He faced her.

"The stove's all right, Sister. It won't draw properly, is all."

"I know, Father, but——"

"That tree"—he pointed through the wall at the small tree which had been spared—"is blocking the draft. If you want your stove to work properly, it'll have to come down. That's all I got to say."

He squinted to read the name on the stove again.

She felt the blood assembling in patches on her cheeks. "Thank you, Father," she said and went quickly out of the kitchen, only wanting to get upstairs and wash the money off her hands.

# BALLET OF THE BOWIE KNIVES

by

William March

In the sternness of Mr. Josson's precise, inflexible world, even a walk must have its practical purpose—a purpose beyond that of simple exercise for its own sake—and that was why he sometimes ended his stroll at Grand Central Terminal having his shoes shined. One evening he climbed upon the high, leather-and-marble dais, took the one vacant seat, and shoved his feet onto the iron lasts before him, waiting his turn. To his left, and downstairs, was the men's washroom, with a line of sailors, soldiers, and marines descending and ascending the stairs in a spaced and earnest stream, like ants engaged in secret and subtle tasks of their own. Two sailors, who had met only a moment before, came up the steps and paused at the door to the waiting room to finish their conversation.

"Talking about the Aru Islands again, did you ever see a bird of paradise there?"

"Well, no. . . . Not a bird of paradise."

"I read in a book that a bird of paradise hasn't got no feet."

"If it hasn't got no feet, how does it stop and rest?"

"That's just it. It don't."

Mr. Josson sighed and turned a little in his seat. Beside him, a large, florid man was reading the latest issue of *Pylon, the Magazine of Personalities,* and as he watched, he saw his companion become interested, then surprised, and at length greatly amused by an item which had caught his eye on the "Pickups of the Week" page. It was plain that he was experiencing one of those moments of incredulous discovery

which make communication with others an imperative necessity, and a moment later he struck the magazine with the backs of his finger tips, turned ponderously to Mr. Josson, and said, "Read that item, Mac, and tell me what you think about it."

Mr. Josson took the magazine and read: "Aggressive, iron-jawed, General Rex I. ("Little Miracle") Rockett, who goes into battle with six sheathed bowie knives fastened to his belt and who, on state occasions, sports a cape lined with imperial purple satin, explained between tasks of wresting islands from the Japs how he happened to acquire his now famous nickname.

"The son of a Baptist minister, as a boy in Arkansas he often helped his father about the church. Once a tornado struck the edifice while Pastor Rockett and his young son were busy in the steeple, repairing the clapper of the church bell. As a result, the steeple was blown off and deposited in a near-by field. Parishioners, digging in the wreckage, extricated Pastor Rockett unhurt and apparently as sound as ever. Upon emerging from the wrecked steeple, the pious pastor said, 'The Lord has wrought a great miracle this day! My life has been spared!' About that time young Rex also crawled out from the debris and said, 'It looks like the Lord has spared me too,' and then added modestly, 'but I guess that was only a *little* miracle.' "

Mr. Josson laughed with polite puzzlement, not even sure that laughter was the reaction expected from him. His companion took back the magazine, rolled it into a tight cylinder, and slapped it aggressively against his bulging, muscular thighs. "Excuse me," he said after a moment. "I forgot. . . . That item couldn't be appreciated by anybody who didn't know the real facts." Then, suddenly, he stuck out his hand and said: "Taprock—Marvin P. Taprock's my name. And now while we're waiting for one of those shoeshine boys to get around to us, I'll tell you how General Rex I. Rockett really got that nickname. I know because I was with him when it happened.

"It was this way, and don't let anybody tell you different. After the last war, some of the boys were sent to French universities to catch up on their educations which had been interrupted a couple of years back. Gus Rockett—Gus was what everybody called him in those days, and it's what I'll call him now—and I got sent to the same school. At that place, they billeted us in some old French barracks at the edge of town, and Gus and I got to be friendly.

"Being friendly with Gus Rockett wasn't hard, because he was as

good-natured and easygoing a guy as you'll ever meet. He didn't seem to have much push in those days, and he never expressed an opinion of his own. It doesn't sound like what you read about the General now, but that's the way Gus was when I first knew him, and I know others who'll bear me out. The boys used to get into arguments in the bunkhouse—it looked like there was an argument of some sort going on all day long and most of the night—but when anybody appealed to Gus for his opinion, he used to tuck his head down and say, 'I guess I don't really know anything about it. It's over my head.'

"At first, Gus and I had cots side by side, but later on a big marine gunnery sergeant named Francis O'Toole changed with him. He said his own bunk was broken, and anyway he liked the location of Gus's bunk better. Gus was at class when the swap took place, but when he returned and heard about it, he just shrugged his shoulders, laughed, and said, 'What difference does it make? If he wants it, let him have it.' . . . It looked like Gus couldn't say no to anybody. You'll see what I mean by that later on."

A policeman came into the room twirling his nightstick. He hesitated at the stairs that led downward to the washroom, then turned and walked toward the seats that lined the wall. Before him, and stretched out asleep on one of the benches, was a small, soiled-looking man who somehow gave the impression that he had burrowed underground to the place where he now reposed. The policeman poked the man in the ribs with his stick and said, "On your feet! Either that, or sit up straight on the bench!"

"At this school I'm talking about now," said Mr. Taprock, "we only had one formation to stand all week, and that was on a Saturday morning. . . . Do you know the formation I'm referring to?"

Mr. Josson confessed that he did not, and his companion went on a little querulously, "Have I got to explain all that to you?" But before Mr. Josson could reply, a shoeshine man came up and mumbled, "Who first? You first? Him first?" Mr. Taprock announced quickly in his vibrant, virile voice, "*I'm* first, son! . . . And I want a good shine this time. Don't just spit and pop your rag over my shoes."

A moment later he turned back to Mr. Josson and said patiently: "This Saturday formation I'm talking about—try to picture the thing for yourself. There we were, fifteen hundred soldiers living in a good-sized town with practically no supervision, and with money to spend. Do I make myself a little plainer, Mac? . . . That Saturday formation

was to see if any of the young gentlemen had been out with naughty girls."

Mr. Josson nodded, averted his eyes, and looked down. To his right and left there stretched a long, unbroken line of shoes—low shoes and high shoes in different states of repair; shoes of various styles, shapes, colors, and sizes—each resting on its individual iron last, fitted there neatly, awaiting its turn. He said that the purpose of the formation was now quite clear in his mind, and Marvin Taprock continued: "I never understood why they wanted to pick a Saturday when some other day would have done as well. You see, Saturday was a holiday from classes, and a lot of the boys got passes and went on sight-seeing trips over the week end. If it hadn't been for that Saturday inspection, they could have left Friday night, and had another whole day at their disposal."

A second shoeshine man came up and began working on Mr. Josson's extended shoes. He worked languidly, sighing as if depressed a little.

"So finally the boys began to cook up ways to get out of the inspection," continued Mr. Taprock. "Gus never went away on trips at all, so a corporal named Johnnie Fawcett asked him, as a favor, if he wouldn't double up and take his place in the line that coming Saturday. You know what I'm talking about now?. . . How Gus would have to work a thing like that?"

Mr. Josson said that he did understand, and Marvin Taprock went on: "Gus Rockett could never refuse anybody anything, like I said, so after a little hemming and hawing, he said yes. These inspections took place in the big mess hall at ten o'clock. The men formed an alphabetical line, and when the doctor's clerk called each name from the roster, the right man was supposed to step forward and pass before Captain Sires, the medical officer in charge. So next Saturday Gus answered for himself and Johnnie Fawcett. He got away with it too, without trouble, so the next week end two other guys asked him to do the same thing for them. One was a marine named Calvin Rose; the other was the same gunnery sergeant, O'Toole, who had taken Gus's bunk away from him. Anyway, to make a long story short, it wasn't long before Gus Rockett had six—well, six *clients,* you might say—on his list. One was a little Italian corporal named Tony Parasol, one was Private Connie Babcock, and the last was another sergeant named Cecil McRoot."

"Didn't he get caught at it?" asked Mr. Josson.

"Well, yes and no. . . . Certainly he got away with it most of that spring, but naturally the boys at the barracks knew what was going on.

Maybe the doctor's clerk knew about it too, but if he did, he never let on. I guess he figured it was up to the medical officer—this Captain Sires who did the inspecting—to catch on for himself. But nobody bothered much about that, because Captain Sires was an impractical guy with a faraway look, and he hardly paid any attention at all to what was going on under his nose, or so we thought at one time. He never had much to do with the other officers, but spent his leisure time examining insects under a microscope, or writing scientific articles for the medical journals."

A heavily rouged woman, with cerise fingernails and false eyelashes, who wore a sleazy silk dress, and who carried in her arms an extraordinarily vigorous boy of two, came to the door and stared down at the men's washroom. Her lips shaped the word "Charlie!" although she remained silent. The squirming baby strained again, lunged forward, and upset the balance of his mother's new, elaborate hat. The woman shook him fretfully and said, "It took me twenty minutes to get that hat tilted just right!" turned abruptly, and went back to the waiting room.

"You'll have to say one thing for Gus Rockett," said Marvin Taprock: "He had to be fast to slip in and out of that line the way he did, and he had to keep his mind on his business so he wouldn't miss his cues. Maybe you've got to have talent for that sort of thing. If you do, then Gus Rockett was blessed with it, and it wasn't long before he started to brag in the bunkhouse about how smart and quick he was. And so things rocked along, and then, near the end of the school term, just before the fellows were to be returned to their regular outfits, Gus got the scare of his life.

"The first name he answered to was Private Babcock, and he noticed that the doctor stopped and made a note of the name on a scratch pad; so he hurried to the rear of the line where I was and said, 'Marvin, that doctor has caught on. He's making notes of the names I answer to.' So I said, 'What are you going to do about it?' and he said, 'What can I do at this late date except bluff it out, and hope for the best?' And so a little later he slipped back into the line to be ready when the clerk called Corporal Fawcett's name. . . . Corporal Fawcett and Private Babcock, as everybody knew at the time, were week-ending in Carcassonne.

"And so it went, right down the list of Gus's clients: Sergeant O'Toole, Corporal Parasol, Private Rockett answering for himself, and Sergeant McRoot, with the Captain making a note of each name as it came up; but he didn't commit himself until the seventh and last name was called —the name of Private Calvin Rose. Captain Sires didn't look up from

his work even then. He just said gently, 'Haven't I seen you somewhere before?' Everybody in the line tittered and tried to muffle it by coughing. The clerk turned and said out of the side of his mouth, 'I'll say you've seen him before, bud!' "

The shoeshine man lifted Mr. Taprock's right foot, turned it toward the light, and examined it thoroughly, to see if the blacking had been applied evenly; then, weighing the inert foot in his palm, he returned it to the iron last and went on with his polishing.

"Poor Gus was scared out of seven years' growth," said Mr. Taprock. "When he spoke, his voice was a sort of squeak high up in his head. 'Who—me?' he asked, and then continued in the same tone, 'Oh, *no,* Captain Sires—not *me*!' He stood there waiting for the storm to break, but nothing more happened. The doctor just made a note of the name, shook his head from side to side, and said, 'This is remarkable! It's completely unbelievable!' Then he said, 'Pass on. Next man, please,' and the inspection continued.

"When Gus got back to the bunkhouse, everybody predicted that he'd got himself in a mess of trouble. They all agreed that the doctor hadn't blown up and bawled him out because he had something worse up his sleeve—something like a summary court-martial, for instance. They advised him to go to the Captain at once, tell him the whole story, and throw himself on the Captain's mercy. Gus asked me to go along with him as a witness, and about an hour later we arrived at Captain Sires's quarters, and knocked on the door. The Captain was in all right, and he called out, 'Wait there in the anteroom, please. You'll find some magazines on the table.'

"And so we came into the anteroom and sat down. Through the door we could see Captain Sires sitting at a table and writing away like his life depended on it. I guess he thought we'd come in for medical treatment, because he looked up, when he got to the end of a page, and said, 'If you're not feeling too bad, would you mind coming back in about an hour? I'm working on a little scientific article at the moment, and I want to finish it up while the material is still fresh in my mind.'

"Before that time, I'd always thought of Captain Sires as an army officer who happened to be a doctor, too; but when he said what he did about waiting in the anteroom, and that there were magazines on the table, I knew it was really the other way around, and that Captain Sires was nothing but a doctor dressed up in an army uniform. There's a big difference between the two, but I'm sure you already know that. Anyway,

Gus and I mumbled something about returning later, and started for the outer door, but I doubt if Captain Sires heard us, because by that time he'd already turned back to his work and had dismissed us from his mind.

"Now, Gus and I didn't go out right away: we stood beside the door, watching the doctor for a while. First, he loosened his collar and closed his eyes; then, thinking he was alone again, he rubbed his hands together, chuckled, and began to write; but he stopped after a little, bit the end of his pencil, and said out loud: '*Seven* of them—and all exactly alike. It's an amazing coincidence! . . . It's a little miracle of science, that's what it is!'

"That was when Gus and I slipped out of the anteroom and hurried back to the bunkhouse, but about halfway we had to stop, lean against a post, and laugh. 'It's an amazing coincidence!' I said. 'It's epoch-making, if you ask me!' . . . 'He still don't know what it's all about,' said Gus. 'I had him fooled from the start, and still have.'

"When we got back to the bunkhouse, Gus explained what had happened. He stuck out his chest, paraded up and down the aisle, and said, 'You gentlemen know what I really am? I'm a little miracle of science, no less, and I demand more respect from you from now on!' "

The woman with the cerise nails and the artificial lashes came once more to the door and looked about her. Just then, the man she was waiting for came up the washroom steps and, before she could open her mouth to upbraid him, walked over to her and said, "Shut your yap!" in a bored voice; then he took the vigorous, lurching baby in his arms and strode through the waiting room, the woman teetering behind him on her insecure, three-inch heels.

"A great change took place in Gus Rockett after that," continued Mr. Taprock. "The first thing he did was to take back his bunk from Sergeant O'Toole. The Sergeant didn't like that at all, so Gus took one wallop at him and knocked him halfway across the room. Private Babcock thought Gus was taking the wrong attitude entirely, and so expressed himself; so Gus invited him back of the barracks, where the boys settled their differences. In a couple of minutes Private Babcock was stretched out flat, with others pouring water on him. The next day Gus picked a fight with Corporal Fawcett and Sergeant McRoot, and whipped them both. He didn't get around to Tony Parasol and Calvin Rose until about the middle of the week, but when he did, it was really something.

"After that, there wasn't any stopping him. He started reading Infantry Drill Regulations and studying military strategy, and when the rest of the boys were discharged later on, he stayed on in the service. He worked harder and harder and rose higher and higher; and now he's a general with a shoulder full of stars and a belt full of bowie knives, as everybody in the whole world knows."

"Shouldn't he wear seven knives instead of six?" asked Mr. Josson in an uncertain voice.

"No," said Marvin Taprock. "Six is the right number. . . . Stop and think a minute."

"Oh, of course!" said Mr. Josson. "Of course you're right!"

The shoeshine man finished Mr. Taprock's shoes and rapped his customer sharply across his heels to indicate that fact. Mr. Taprock paid for his shine, glanced at his watch, and said, "I've got to hurry if I expect to catch that train for Little Neck!" He wheeled abruptly and loped away, pulling at his trousers from the back.

The policeman glanced at himself in the mirror, twirling his nightstick. Then he passed through a door to the left, in the direction of the passenger ramp.

The soiled little man, seeing him go, muttered and glared about the room. He stretched out on his original bench and went back to sleep.

Two of the shoeshine men began arguing passionately in their native language. They made threatening gestures with brushes, menacing each other with bottles of polish. Suddenly their anger subsided. They spat, shrugged their shoulders, and went back to their work.

Three young sailors came up the steps, immaculately washed, brushed, and polished. When they saw the enormous, crowded room before them, and heard the stimulating sound of the city that awaited them outside, they slapped one another excitedly and pranced quickly across the floor, almost dancing on their toes.

# CONFETTI NIGHT

by

Betty Baur

OPHELIA passed the spiced fruit drink in the tall narrow glasses to her mother's guests. Mr. Stanley St. John, the brilliant young graduate student, winked at her and tasted the drink with the expression of a connoisseur.

"There's nothing in it but fruit juices and spices," Ophelia said. She looked at him with her bright vacant stare. "You know Mother."

Mr. St. John turned crimson. He thought that everyone in the room must have heard Ophelia. He had never met her before but had often heard of Dr. Gainer's queer twenty-eight-year-old daughter who taught kindergarten.

But Dr. Gainer went on analyzing the balance of military forces as they stood on this last evening of the old year. Against the rich upholstery of the chair she was uncommonly handsome. Her white curly hair was like a spun-glass wig. Her ripe-apple cheeks were flawless. It was the head of an eighteenth-century landed gentleman, apoplectic and strong-willed. Her body was that of a plump old woman.

At eleven o'clock supper was announced by Judith, the Negro girl who helped when Dr. Gainer entertained. In the dining room the mahogany refectory table, set with lace, heavy silver, and fine glass, was weighted with food, all of it cooked by Dr. Gainer herself, as her guests were well aware. Coffee, the sole beverage other than water, was brought in by Judith in a silver pot on a silver tray.

"Every time I come here," Mr. Robart exclaimed with sincerity and energy, "I am astounded all over again. You are a wonderful woman, Dr. Gainer."

Dr. Gainer smiled rosily at him. "You are to sit here, Emil," she said, "at my right." Her plump hand rested on his sleeve. She always addressed her younger male colleagues by their first names. Young Mrs. Robart, who had that day scrubbed the kitchen floor and washed the baby's clothes, saw in Dr. Gainer's gesture an arch intimacy. It seemed to her a giant colored bubble had been around the two all evening, a joint intellectual halo, excluding her.

Seated, the party stared hungrily at the feast before them. Stanley St. John was very poor and had skipped dinner. And the Robarts had dined at six on shrimp wiggle, a mainstay of Mrs. Robart's uninspired menus.

"I want you to notice," Dr. Gainer said in her shrill imperious treble, "Ophelia's centerpiece."

"I have been noticing it." Mrs. Robart was relieved to find something she could say.

They all looked at the fragrant lilies-of-the-valley in the curious black bowl. From a bed of peat moss the flowers were thrusting up their green wands hung with white bells. Someone—Ophelia, of course, who was known for her impractical nature—had set in the perfumed grove a small ivory figurine of a Chinese lady.

"It's perfectly lovely," said Mrs. Robart. "So . . . artistic."

Ophelia looked up from her plate, and her bright expressionless eyes came to rest on the flowers. An anxious tenderness came over her face. She seemed to be looking at a child.

"A leaf is turning brown," she said. "It is hard to raise flowers in the city. They need fresh air and sun, and apartments are always too hot and dry."

Dr. Gainer laughed. "If Ophelia had her way we would all be freezing here tonight."

"Plants need moist air," said Ophelia, "and about sixty-five degrees."

"I wonder if you realize," Mr. Robart said to her, "how celebrated your green fingers are in the department of social sciences?" He looked about the room. Philodendron climbed beside the windows and twined about a rod at the top, dropping pretty heart-shaped leaves over the drawn curtains. Orange and crimson nasturtiums spilled gracefully from a stand under the windows, which faced south.

Ophelia said seriously, "Plants are like people. When you understand them it's easy to grow them. I want them to be happy."

"Plants or people, do you mean?" Mr. Robart asked.

"She means plants, of course," Dr. Gainer said briskly. "She doesn't care two pins about people, whatever she may say. I can't imagine why Ophelia ever decided to teach."

Stanley St. John assumed his most urbane manner. "Surely, Dr. Gainer, you wouldn't say you loved people, and yet you are a superb teacher." He did not worry about laying it on somewhat thick, because he was convinced Dr. Gainer liked it that way.

Dr. Gainer looked pleased. "It's true I haven't exactly carried on a love affair with the human race in my lifetime. But after all I have been interested in ideas. And a teacher needs to love either people or ideas." She glanced at Ophelia, and it was clear she felt that Ophelia loved neither.

Mr. Robart and Stanley St. John laughed appreciatively, but Ophelia had stopped listening to the conversation. At the table they all heard the reverberation of a slammed door somewhere below them. Ophelia pushed back her chair with an abstracted gesture.

"Mother," she said, "Mr. Gosse and Mr. Butterfield have come back with their friends. I can hear them." She stood up and said vaguely to the company, "Please excuse me," and vanished into the living room.

Faintly, tin horns were being tooted in the street, accompanied by a muffled hum of laughing and singing. A quivering agitation disturbed the old walls, quiet as a country town until now.

At a loss, Dr. Gainer's guests looked at her.

"'Mr. Gosse and Mr. Butterfield,' as Ophelia calls them, are my new tenants downstairs," she said dryly. "They are giving a party tonight in their extraordinary establishment."

"How interesting!" said Mrs. Robart. "Are they bachelors?"

"They haven't had an opportunity to be anything else, yet," said Dr. Gainer. "They graduated last June from one of those little colleges in Ohio."

Mr. Robart was amused. "The ghosts down here in Greenwich Village are a priceless asset to landlords."

"Yes, isn't it extraordinary?" Dr. Gainer looked about the table. "Do have some more coffee. It's almost midnight, by the way. In fifteen minutes it will be 1942." She tinkled a little silver bell. "Judith, fresh coffee, please."

She resumed, "For some reason Ophelia has taken quite an interest in these boys. Out of sheer pity she made sandwiches for them the day they moved in with their two pianos and collection of P. G. Wodehouse. I

have been rather amused myself. They have some sort of little eighteen-dollar-a-week jobs."

"Are they both musical?" Stanley St. John sneered faintly.

"No, thank heavens. But Stepan—Mr. Gosse—is a hot-jazz enthusiast and he keeps the second piano for any friends who drop in. The other one, David, is a highly romantic personality who is trying to forget his father is superintendent of the Presbyterian Sunday School in Whitecliffe, New Jersey. That smoky old grate in what used to be my grandfather's downstairs study completely captured the boy's imagination. He's the one who owns the collection of Wodehouse. I think he aspires to be a moronic man about town, rather like Bertie Wooster."

"How pathetic! Especially now . . . isn't it?" said Mrs. Robart suddenly.

"Pathetic? What do you mean?" Dr. Gainer's hard bright eyes fixed her. "Oh, you mean the war, of course. We really all mean only that, these days, no matter what we talk about. Now, my dear young woman, please don't become sentimental. If these young men are bundled into uniform in the next few months it will do them a world of good."

"A man about town on eighteen dollars a week," said Stanley St. John morosely. "The colleges are turning them out at a younger mental age every year. It's awful."

"Why shouldn't they try to have fun?" asked Mrs. Robart with sudden bellicosity. "I don't suppose it's their fault they only get eighteen dollars a week." Her face flushed.

In the dark living room Ophelia looked down into the street, concealed by her collection of ferns. The boys had come back in their Packard touring car. The top was down. Indistinguishable forms in bulky coats and blankets were disentangling themselves and getting to the sidewalk. Green, pink, and white paper streamers decorated the chromium fittings of the car and spiraled from the fenders. The street lamp sparkled on a girl's hair ornament. Two more cars drew up behind the Packard, and the confusion and joy mounted. Confetti fell in bright showers. A tall thin figure in a dress suit and no coat came darting down the steps, clasped in his arms a laughing girl with a chiffon scarf over her head, and dashed up the steps with her.

Ophelia's eyes glowed. David in a dress suit! she thought. Impatiently she pushed aside the fronds of her choice polypodium fern. She was looking for Stepan. There he was. Also in a dress suit. Not so tall as David,

and his dark hair poetically long. He was dancing around to keep warm and shouting to his friends to hurry up.

Ophelia bit her lip to keep her excitement under control.

What a night! she thought.

Another shower of confetti glinted in the crackling cold.

Confetti night!

Then the sidewalk was empty. Next door in the basement areaway the sign of the Chinese laundry creaked in the wind. On the other side the restaurant windows were opaque with steam. A glimpse of Washington Square, of naked dark branches lightly frosted with snow, showed at the end of the street.

Ophelia remained where she was, staring at the Packard as she had many times before. On that first afternoon of all, two months ago, it had been piled chaotically with what her mother called "the ridiculous possessions of those ridiculous young men": the secondhand Venetian blinds that were too short and too narrow, the homemade indirect-lighting apparatus, the long maroon velvet curtains, "like they have in a club" as David said. Later, the Packard had arrived laden with young trees for the fireplace, cut down in Jersey by David and Stepan arrayed in lumbershirts and carrying axes strapped to their belts. Under all conditions the car had a decayed magnificence, a largeness, a regal quality that enchanted Ophelia. She seemed to see it, in its true destiny, coming to a stop at the ends of tree-lined driveways in front of noble porticoes, or winging along a white road by the ocean on a moonlight night. The seats were splitting at the seams, but after all they were red leather. The fenders were dented, but the profusion of chromium glitter made one overlook such flaws. And the white-walled tires had all the inimitable smartness of their kind, even if one of them was almost flat.

Ophelia started back from the window. Her mother and her guests were leaving the dining room. She switched on a light.

"Five minutes to midnight!" Dr. Gainer announced briskly. She compared her watch with the chiming clock on the mantel. "I suppose you will be deserting us soon," she said to Ophelia dryly.

Ophelia blushed. "Well, I've never been to a New Year's Eve party . . . and they did ask me."

"Ophelia is irresistibly drawn to the young." Dr. Gainer seated herself in the big wing chair by the fire. "Now, my dear child, don't let us stop you. Go whenever you like."

Ophelia was scarlet. "I'll go later. And anyway, only for a few minutes.

It would be rude not to, wouldn't it? After all, they know I'm right upstairs."

"I think it's a very nice idea," said Mrs. Robart. "They sound as though they were having a wonderful time."

The urgent rumble of boogy-woogy, like steam under high pressure, came up through the thick floor.

"Both pianos are going," said Dr. Gainer. "Isn't it the most incredible music?"

Outside, boat whistles shrieked, sirens wailed, and bells clanged.

"Happy New Year! Happy New Year!" cried young Mrs. Robart. She jumped up and kissed her husband.

"Happy New Year!" Dr. Gainer beamed. "The year of victory."

Ophelia started by having a drink at the bar in the alcove. The bar was a shaky framework covered with imitation leather held on by brass-headed nails. On the wall behind was fastened a hanging bookcase that displayed an assortment of empty Scotch bottles and one beer mug. The drinks were ladled from a punch bowl into jelly glasses, water glasses, and cups by a girl in a red dress. She was at the same time singing a tune from an Italian opera. The heat and noise were stupefying.

"Her father's a barber," David whispered in Ophelia's ear. "She's in love with Stepan, so he gets free haircuts."

In a confused way Ophelia was aware of a number of things simultaneously: David's beaming, red-rimmed eyes; the trills of the girl in the red dress; and across the room, Stepan's Byronic profile low over the piano and the throaty roar of his performance, augmented by another youth at the upright piano.

Blinking rapidly she asked David, "Why are you and Stepan wearing dress suits?" Although the strange repulsive drink was running through her veins with the alacrity of quicksilver she still wondered about this.

"It was Step's idea," said David. "See that blonde over there? She's the model I was telling you about, Susie. Step's carrying the torch for her."

Was this an explanation or wasn't it? Already Ophelia was too confused to know. She stared at Susie, a cool blonde in a tight-fitting taffeta that made her painfully slender, like an oar rather than a girl. She had fine hair that curled childishly about her shoulders.

Ophelia looked into her drink. It was surprising how quickly the stuff vanished, and this was her second.

"Did I tell you about Mother's brandy glass?" she asked David. "Last April Fool's Day Mother found a florist's box on her desk and when she opened it there was a brandy glass about ten inches high, and April Fool printed on a card. She said it was outrageous, but I thought it was funny. I have a terrarium in it now."

"What's a terrarium?"

"It's like an aquarium, but instead of water and fish, it has earth and plants."

David said to the girl in the red dress, "See that beer mug up there? Fill it up for me." He indicated the contents of the punch bowl.

"This," Ophelia went on, holding up her glass, "is the first alcoholic drink I've ever had in my life. Mother's a militant Dry. But why should I tell you? Everybody in the world knows Mother is a Dry."

"This is more than a New Year's Eve party for me and Step." David waved the mug at Ophelia. "It's a farewell party. We're going to war next month."

"I know," said Ophelia. "Stepan told me. I'd like to dance. There's a little room over here. Will you dance with me?"

She and David began to shuttle back and forth, avoiding the legs of the couples on the Hollywood bed, the pair that was jitterbugging, and those sitting on the floor. Then a fat boy with glasses cut in, and Ophelia found herself bouncing about like a rubber ball in the wavelets of a swimming pool. Her partner had a perfectly round face which glistened from fat and heat, and a queer way of dancing, as though his knees had springs in them. She whirled rapidly, faster and faster, always in the same direction. She became quite dizzy. She felt that this time she really would get entirely away from whatever it was, she couldn't quite remember, that she wanted to get away from. And then there was the red leather bar again and the singing girl in the red dress, and Susie, the cool blonde. She and Susie leaned against the bar and talked to the girl in the red dress.

"Do you know," Ophelia said seriously, "my mother hates women." The noise in the room was boiling like a caldron.

Susie's reply came dimly through the thick vapors: "Isn't that kind of silly?"

"In the old days," said Ophelia, "she was a suffragette."

"I heard of them somewheres." The blonde Susie began to make up her lips. The vapors thinned a little.

"You ought to know about the suffragettes," said Ophelia severely. "If it hadn't been for them, you wouldn't be able to vote."

"Yeah?" Susie stared at Ophelia, her lipstick poised.

The girl in the red dress refilled Ophelia's glass.

"She was a suffragette," Ophelia tilted the glass in several different ways to see the light playing on the surface, "because she wanted a chance to shine, to be somebody, and she couldn't as long as women weren't even allowed to vote. So everybody always thinks she's a great champion of justice and freedom. But her talk really comes down to one thing: justice and freedom for Anastasia."

Susie looked bewildered.

"Who's Anastasia?"

"That's her name."

"David shouldn't play crap," said Susie suddenly. "Up against the local boys he'll always be a hick."

Ophelia saw that a crap game was indeed going on. David, his curly hair rumpled and his tails behind him like spider legs, was on the floor with some others. From the knot of heads issued strange incantations. Ophelia went with Susie and the girl in the red dress and watched. The dice had eyes that looked from each face. Then there was a tremendous upheaval, a wild excitement of laughing and cheering and groaning.

"What happened?" Ophelia caught Susie's wrist. Tears of laughter spurted in Susie's eyes.

"I told you," she said, "David lost, just like I said he would."

David's red-rimmed eyes beamed down upon everyone from his six-foot-two height and he flapped his spindly hollow-chested frame like a marionette on wires.

"Bunter," he shouted, "my pajamas."

"What's happening? What is he doing?" Ophelia begged.

Susie and the girl in red couldn't talk. They screamed and danced about.

"My pajamas!" David roared.

"Get your coat!" screamed Susie to Ophelia. "Come on!"

"Where are we going?"

Stepan suddenly materialized beside them and began helping Susie into her mouton coat. He stroked her fur shoulder.

"Stop pawing me, Step," she said.

"Where are we going?" Ophelia asked.

"Oh, don't you see?" Susie shrieked at her. "David lost and they had forfeits not money and now he has to run around Washington Square in his pajamas."

Ophelia said, "I haven't got a coat with me."

And then she saw David prancing about the room in white-and-blue-striped pajamas. The legs reached only a few inches below his knees. He bolted for the door, and they all followed.

Ophelia knew that David must have run around Washington Square in his pajamas and that she must have been there, because she remembered afterwards with great vividness his bare bony ankles and the soles of his shoes as he ran. She also remembered the faint stars and the bright buildings and the cold. And the fresh air was a drink even stronger than those she had had before. She felt that nothing that had mattered in the past was any longer of consequence.

When they got back she sat by the fire with Stepan. Stepan's eyes were on Susie, who would not look at him or talk to him, but was dancing with someone else. Stepan did not talk as much as David and was more self-sufficient. There was no way to tell what he was like or what he was thinking. Ophelia's thoughts wandered.

"My mother is man-crazy," she remarked. "She becomes such good friends with all the young men on the faculty that their wives get very jealous."

Reluctantly Stepan turned his eyes from Susie. He kicked a coal that had rolled out of the grate and was glowing on the hearth. "But your mother's an old bag. Why should they be jealous?"

Ophelia smiled in a superior way. "To you she's an old bag. But certain intellectual men, and not old ones either, find her a little dangerous and exciting. They would be afraid of her if she were younger, but she's so old—sixty-three—that they think they're safe."

Someone had turned most of the bright lights off, to make it pleasanter for the couples on the Hollywood bed. It was quite dim over in the corner by the fireplace, almost as though they were alone in the warm center of a dark, stealthy forest where no bird ever sang.

"Haven't you a father?" asked Stepan. "Where's your father?"

"Oh, he died years ago. When I was eleven."

"What was he like?"

"Do you know, I can't remember. I wonder sometimes why I can remember hardly anything much before I was thirteen or fourteen. And

all I remember about my father was one Easter when my mother was very angry with him."

"Why?" Stepan was making a little road in the white ash with the point of his shoe.

"Oh," said Ophelia, "you are wearing brown shoes, Stepan."

"Yes. My money ran out after I hired the dress suit."

"I only noticed it just now."

"That's what I counted on. Nobody sees your feet on New Year's Eve."

"My father took me to church," said Ophelia. "To hear the music. My mother was not home. I don't know why. And I can see her coming in from outdoors with a little fur like an animal wrapped around her neck. I remember her pink cheeks and her blue eyes like electricity."

"You know, of course," said Stepan, "that I am so crazy about Susie that I nearly faint when she touches me, though she never does, except by accident."

"Yes, I know."

"And she uses awful grammar too."

"Yes, I heard her. But she's very pretty."

"She's too thin, but that doesn't seem to matter."

"That's true. You are too young, and yet that doesn't seem to matter."

"What do you mean, too young?"

"I mean I am almost twenty-nine and you are about twenty-one."

Stepan looked puzzled. "I don't quite understand," he said carefully, "but later when everybody goes home—they will go home eventually, of course—I would like to play the piano for you. I feel you are sympathetic to me, if you know what I mean. Not the English word, the Spanish, *simpático*."

"Yes, I know what you mean."

"You were telling me about your mother coming home angry."

"Yes. She shouted and stamped up and down. I remember the buttons on her shoes, and crying. I don't remember what my father said or did or anything like that. I just remember Mother being angry at someone behind me and then she took the card they gave me in church and tore it to pieces. I cried and cried."

"What kind of a card?"

"It showed Jesus in a white light stepping out of the tomb, and the angel who rolled away the stone. Doves and lilies were twined around the card and the surface was glazed. I thought it was awfully pretty."

"What a damn-fool thing to do. Taking away a kid's picture. What did she do that for?"

"Of course, then I didn't understand. But later I knew it was because she thought religion was fairy tales, untrue, you know."

"Even if she did, why did she have to make you cry?" Stepan took Ophelia's hand between both of his. "I hate cruelty," he said. "Love is sometimes cruel, but then, perhaps it isn't really love. I love Susie and I could never be cruel to her."

Ophelia took her hand away. "I love you."

"Yes, I thought so. Everything is queer tonight. Well, it doesn't matter because I am going away, everybody is going away. Did you know, you have confetti in your hair? It makes you look like somebody in a children's play at Christmas."

"You said you would play the piano for me."

"Yes, when everybody has gone away."

"They have all gone away."

Stepan turned around. The silence was deep, a city of soundless walls in depth. The two sat in the warm firelight. The room was dim beyond them. Nobody was there. They had all gone home. The house was quiet, the street was quiet. A faint chime came from the still depths of the house.

"I think that must be a ghost," said Ophelia. "My great-grandfather's clock sounded exactly the same. It used to stand on the mantelpiece here. This was his downstairs study."

"You're almost as thin as Susie," Stepan said. He took her hand again, and she did not withdraw it. "And you have small hands like hers, but her hands have long sharp red nails and yours are soft and gentle, as though you took care of someone or something."

Again Ophelia took away her hand. "You may think I'm thin, but I'm not. My soul is a two-hundred-pound woman. I am so clumsy I am always having collisions, not with chairs, but with the souls of other people. Only small children are agile enough to stay out of my way. They skip around me like lambs around a mountain and then I am happy. The mountain loves the lambs and lambs love the mountain. They feed on her bosom, the bosom of the lovely broad green mountain."

"I don't know what you are talking about, but then again, I think I do." Stepan got up. "They have all gone, so I am going to play for you."

He walked carefully across the littered room. Spilled drinks and glasses, a scarf, a pack of fortunetelling cards, cigarettes.

"We are all alone on a faraway shore. This is very nice. I don't seem to have a past or a future. It is nice being on a deserted shore with a scarf and a pack of cards," Stepan bent down, "and a stocking. This is a girl's stocking."

He sat down at the piano. His hands went up the keys tentatively. "You see," he turned to Ophelia, "I must wake up the guardian spirit, a jealous little witch who must be catered to."

They both smiled. Stepan began to play, a wild melancholy air. Then the music became very soft, the piano seemed to whisper curious, urgent, bittersweet music. Later, crashing chords were falling like tall buildings, and then the whispering began again.

Ophelia came up beside him. She said, "I know I am drunk, Stepan, I am so sleepy and strange." Standing behind him, she twined her arms around his neck.

Without turning he kissed her arm, catching her wrist.

"And you are very drunk too, though you are still a gentleman." Ophelia clasped her arms tighter and rested her cheek against the back of his head.

"Susie, Susie," Stepan said. "I knew you would come back when I played my witch music. And you aren't cruel any more because you are half another girl, I forget her name, but now you have her hands." He kissed the hands on his shoulders passionately.

Ophelia whispered very softly into his hair, so that he would not hear her, "I am not Susie." And even softer, to herself, "And I am not Dr. Gainer's daughter any more—nor will I ever be again."

# O PRAIRIE GIRL, BE LONELY

by

Meridel LeSueur

> . . . there is a song deep as the falltime redhaws, long as the layer of black loam we go to, the shine of the morning star over the corn belt, the wave line of dawn up a wheat valley.
>
> —Carl Sandburg

Look, honey, Butch says, it's now more than ever.

Oh, we're not going to do it now? I said.

If we don't do it now, when would we do it? No matter what we do we got to have it now. If you get rid of it we got to have it and if you have it we got to have it.

Yes, I said, that's the way it is.

All right, he said, then we got to go through. Are you game?

Yes, I said, lifting up my face. How can we be together, that's the point. It's no good if we can't be together at all, it's no good, any of it.

We got to be together, honey, he said.

I feel strong when he says that, and everything in me seems to rise and bloom and cry for growth. Sometimes he looks at me and seems to raise me up and put his hands within me like in an orchard, and then he seems like a devil to me and I know there is no way to be having what we need and want and then everything in my whole being sinks down like into a sea and I can feel my hair standing up and everything looks unreal like in an old movie and cracked apart as if cement was nothing.

Are you game? he says.

Yes, I say, if there's no other way, but not until we know it.

Don't you know it? Lord, when do you learn? You got to be cracked up complete?

Don't get mad, Butch. Please.

All right, he says, I show you how to do it and you won't do it, you ain't got the guts, you're crummy.

No, I said, please don't talk so loud, everybody's looking.

All right let them look, so what? Why don't you get some sense, then you wouldn't have a child. Live and let live, that's my motto. It's no thanks to bring a child into the world now. You have to feed them or they'll die if you don't, won't they? Sure you have to feed them for years and years. They'll get sick and all that kind of stuff because you can't take care of them. They'll have all kinds of stuff, and then they'll get bombed like in other countries and I don't care what happens to grown people, get what I mean, they can take it, but kids is different, what happens to kids is a hundred per cent different, get what I mean?

Yes, I said.

You should get smart so you won't be having a child. You got yourself into this. Now you got all the big odors sniffing around. Since you live with that whore.

I won't listen to your foul language, I said. Everybody in the joint was looking at us. The sun was shining outdoors.

You can listen to all that crap of everyone else and enjoy it, he said.

Who, what, who do you mean, what are you talking about?

You know what I'm talking about.

Lord, O God.

Anybody can tell you anything and you make off you enjoy it, he said.

Who? Who told me anything?

Oh, everybody, anybody.

Mention one person.

Well, Ganz . . .

You told me to be nice to him.

All right don't expect anything of me. I haven't got anything. I told you that from the start, didn't I? Didn't I? I didn't make off anything I wasn't. I didn't hamstring you along, did I? Did I?

No.

There you see. Don't slap your brats onto me.

I don't care, I cried, leave me alone! I don't see why we can't have a life. We don't want much.

No, not much.

Oh, we'll cry our strong cry, something will come.

Sure, howl to the moon . . .

Well, I will, I said, standing up in the booth, I will.

Sit down, he said, don't get excited. Nobody cares a rap in hell what happens to you, might as well get that first as last. Get rid of it. I could do it myself with a pair of scissors, there's nothing to it. Listen, you are just like Clara, why are you looking at that little dago, giving him the come-on?

I began to sweat with cold. I wasn't looking at anyone but Butch.

Cut it out, I cried. I could smell food cooking. I want something to eat. I began to cry. I'm hungry.

I haven't anything to feed you, I told you that.

I began to cry.

All right, Butch said, touching me suddenly, putting his hand over mine on the table. All right don't make a noise, you might wake him up. He's Irish and he likes his sleep.

I smiled at him. I felt like bells were ringing in all my flesh. I felt lovely and quick, laughing. It's not a fault being hungry and it's not a fault men hate the hungers in women now that they can't be filling, it's not a fault asking for child, food, love.

I wanted to warm him.

Ganz opened the door, the December sun shining on him too. He came over and sat down and said, A round on me, to the bartender. And then he said, How are you? to me and I said, All right, and Butch was watching me like a hawk. He said, Butch, we got to go see about the car. Butch said, It's got to have the license plates changed on it.

Shut up, you crumb, Ganz says, and smiles at me.

Ganz and Butch drank up and they both got up and Butch made out he dropped his scarf and touched my leg and smiled at me. Wait here for me, he said, no matter how long. And then he and Ganz went out the door.

I looked at the clock; it was five-thirty when they left.

You can't sit in a room alone now quiet. I got desires now, wild, like the dark sweet fruit of the night that breaks on your tongue. How can you sit down now in a room and mend your stockings and polish your nails and maybe think about your mother, with your flesh like the wild breaking of spring, like a tree after a storm, weighted to the ground and rain water in your throat and your hair springing wild out of your skull and the strong root terrible in the earth with bitter strength?

It's a quarter to seven. You look at the clock. In a short time he can

be gone and back again. Somebody comes in and asks for Hoinck and Belle says in her full voice, Hoinck went out. He mixed a Tom and Jerry, then put on his hat and checkered scarf and went out. My husband went out. Man, husband, what is he? Why should grief sit on your body like a carrion for knowing one?

And Butch, wild with longing and anger, weeping in his sleep. He picked up a bottle last night and filled his own glass, and left mine empty and then threw the bottle at me. Then he threw the rye-bread rinds from his sandwich.

Ack has been drunk all night and now he is up to no good, coming in with a suitcase full of bootleg.

I am sitting here alone. He has to hate me. The way it is he has to. It is funny how you can stand more than you thought, and feel yourself inside get stronger, and taste the salt of your own wounds, and the weight of the things that have happened to you.

At seven Butch came back and when he came in the door I could see he didn't like anything. I knew I would say the wrong thing. I knew whatever happened it would be wrong. We had a beer and I said I don't know whether to do it or not, I had a dream I thought I would have the child, and I would go south in the sun to have it and I dreamed I was looking through a little hole like in those candy eggs we used to have where you saw lambs grazing and a little house and children playing in the sugar. I said, It's Friday, and I ought to decide if I'm going to do it.

Butch said, I don't give a damn if it is Friday.

I said, Well, I could go south and have it, then I wouldn't be any trouble to you.

Oh, so you're going south, he said, so you are going away with my own kid. I'm not supposed to have even that, am I? Or maybe it ain't mine, so I am going to have a baby by somebody else.

No, Butch, honest it's yours.

Why don't you tell me?

You wouldn't want to give me anything.

The hell with you, Butch said, another beer—my father did that with me, made me come home and pray and mumbo-jumbo. To hell with women.

I feel an awful hunger in me. I feel like an idiot with my mouth open and my eyes hanging out. Clara came over.

They were going to do a square dance, she said.

They want to do a square dance, I said to Butch. The big apple.

There isn't enough people, Clara said. Come on, I'll get you a man.

Don't you want to dance the square dance? I said to Butch.

No, he said. He looked so cold and when he looked at me his eyes were cold.

Come on, Clara said.

Oh, no, I couldn't, I said. We sat there.

Butch said, We've got to do it with Ganz. Ten dollars more and I can get the lease from the Standard Oil—I can have a station of my own, I can have a station, then we will be sitting pretty.

He kept on drinking. What is to become of us? Why do we fall apart? He sat there so silent. We seem so good . . . what happens to us? We are being eaten by some rot. Why do we give in to it? He didn't answer. It's like it isn't in us . . . like we didn't do it. He just sat there. I don't want to become hard and bitter . . . I don't like to feel it. I don't know what there is to do. I don't want a success like Butch. I want to be . . . I love to be . . .

A ballplayer came over. Listen, he said to Butch, when were you with the Wisconsin Blue Socks?

I sat there. People's heads kept going by the window. You could just see their heads and they looked like a strong wind was pushing them yet it was very still outside. It looked as if it might snow. The sky was low down and looked full.

After the ballplayer left Butch said, You've got to do it, that's all. You've got to have it.

I sat looking down at the wood of the table. It had little lines in it. Then I saw that he was sitting quite still, and he was crying.

Don't, Butch, I said.

Honey, he said, you know I'd like to have a kid, you know that now, don't you?

Sure, Butch, I said.

I looked out the window across the street. It said Garbo Coke . . . 20 per cent more heat, lasts longer—no ash. It was upstairs you got it. Some girls went there at noon and had it and then went back to work. The doors have no doorknobs on them, you can only open them with a key, no one can open the door from the outside. Clara told me that. Clara says it smells awful and he doesn't wash his hands.

I suppose you like to stay with Clara because of the men, Butch said.

Oh, yes, the men. Oh, I entertain men all the time. I'm crazy about men.

We sat there. Another beer, Butch told Clara.

The little pad the beer sat on said, In my old cupboard who wants bones cried Mother Hubbard I like Schmidt's. The radio was announcing that the White Sox made a home run. We won't ever take a home run ring the bell beat the race come in first . . . there's nothing to it, science is wonderful. Listen, honey, don't cry. . . . It's nothing. I'll do it. I'll do it.

You'll do it, he cried, you don't care for it, you don't want to have it.

Don't cry, I said. I knew he would get mad next.

Listen, I'll be back in a jiffy and I'll be O.K. Everything will be O.K. You sit right here and I'll be back in an hour. The way science has it now it's wonderful. Don't worry.

I walked out the door, and across the street.

I could hear men's voices. It seemed dark where I was but there was a light a long way off. I lay quiet like an animal when hunters are near.

The clerks get there early, Ganz was saying. Eight o'clock. We wait outside. The girl here drives the stolen hack. Ack has another waiting out beyond the bridge to transfer the dough. Butch stands by the corner at five after eight. We have to wait for the vault to open. If we go in before the vault is open then we're done for.

How much do you think it will crack? Hone said.

I could smell them sitting there under the light, bending over the map of the bank in South St. Paul that Hoinck had made. I had seen it before. It was a good map. You could see the pillars and the door and a black space in the back where the vault was and the places were marked where each clerk stood by the cash drawer. I knew it by heart.

Hone was leaning over me sharp as a knife.

He pushed me into a chair between them. I looked at the drawing spread on the table. I could feel their awful bodies on each side of me, the soft putrid body of Ganz and the sharp-knifed body of Hone. I felt sad.

I felt bad and like I would never feel any different.

How much you think it'll crack? Hone repeated.

If the vault is open—plenty.

How much?

Don't worry, Hone, you'll get yours all right, you bloodsucking bastard.

Oh, I'll get mine, Hone said. To me he said, If people only knew how square I am. They're always misjudging me. I'm always trying to do the right thing and where does it get me?

Oh, bull! Ganz said.

When the vault is open, Ganz said, Butch moves in. I cover the cashier from the side. . . . Butch has got to be good. You think that mewling baby of yours can do it?

I didn't answer.

And you, he said to me, see if you'll be any good at this. You sit in the car. There's a copper on the corner with red hair. You watch him. He'll be directing morning traffic at that hour and he'll be standing on that corner, and that's where he should stay. If he moves you give the signal.

I tried to remember it. I knew I ought to remember it good. Our lives might depend on it now. What we had left.

What's the signal? I said.

Ganz said, and he put his heavy hand on my shoulder—I tried not to move—you lean out the window on the opposite side and toot the horn like you was tootin' for someone in the building opposite. One long, two short. That's for you to remember.

I'll remember, I said and looked at him. I'll remember forever. Even dogs don't do it that way.

And watch in back for the bulls. They come up from behind now in plain clothes. Watch in the mirror but don't look uneasy. Look quiet and sleepy. Look natural and dumb like always.

Yes, I said. I guess I am dumb.

Keep your foot on the clutch all the time . . . ready for a getaway. Everything depends upon speed with us in there. We got to do it quick and easy, see? Everything depends on it like Hitler does it. Know how Hitler does it? Surprise, that's his racket, that's the thing Hitler's got, surprises . . . the poor rubes don't know what's up and don't believe anything's going to happen and before they know it he's over the hurdles with the dough in his jeans pretty as a picture.

Yeah, Hone says, that baby's smart.

Plenty, Ganz says. I'd like to hone in on his racket. What we need in this country is somebody like Hitler, that's what we need. Hitler knows we don't need so many people, kill off half of 'em, leave only the best people who know what it's all about. We don't need all these wops and Jews. God, I hate Jews . . . I would like to snipe off a few Jews myself.

Jews ain't so bad, Hone whined.

That's the way it is, Ganz said. I don't want anybody to argue with me, see? Hey, are you a Jew? he asked Hone.

Hone said, Hell, no, Ganz, you know I'm not.

Well, you better not be. I hate Jews. I don't like 'em, see?

O.K. Hone looked scared. Take it easy. No kiddin', Ganz, how much will she go for?

You mean the girl or the bank? Ganz laughed. She's not so bad. Nice and young. The way I like 'em.

I mean the bank—her too. Hone grinned.

If we spike the vault and she's open, she ought to come through with thirty grand.

Whew! Hone said.

As long as no one gets out of there it's all right. Butch has got to watch that. Think he can watch that? That baby of yours?

Yes, I said. He can do it all right.

God, love is wonderful. Ain't love grand, Hone?

Hone got up and began to skip around the room like he was holding his skirts. Ganz laughed. Speed's the thing a fast clout.

Speed's the thing, Hone said.

One man getting past your sweet potato will queer it. You better tell him to be good. I'll turn around and plug him where he stands if he lets a man get through that door and get out again with a loud mouth.

I looked at Ganz. I never hated anyone before—I knew that now.

What about my friend here? he said.

You're both rats, I said.

All right, Ganz said. Never mind, Hone, get you another, the woods are full. But keep your mouth buttoned up, he said to me.

You keep yours, I said.

And I ran out and down all the stairs, past the clerk at the desk, and into the street and I looked back and saw all the windows behind me brightly lighted and the smooth furniture inside and the nice beds. I always wanted to see what they did in there. Now I knew. I ran into the park and I touched the trees and I leaned down and picked up some dirt and ate it. It tasted bitter. . . .

And I kept walking and looking at men and now I knew something. This is what happened. Now I knew it. I was going to know more. Nobody knew anything that didn't do it. Down below you know everything and there are some things you can never tell, never speak of, but they move inside you like yeast.

Belle said, Tomorrow night this time they might all be dead.

Stop it, Belle, I said. Hoinck was playing poker with three other men.

Cut it out, Hoinck said, and have a drink. Hit me.

I wanted him to quit for years, I'm going to kill myself if he doesn't, Belle cried.

Have a drink, I said.

A fine way to talk the night before a big job. Hoinck said, We got to go to work tomorrow for sure.

Go to work, Belle said in scorn. She began to cry. It isn't worth it, all the money in the world, it isn't worth it.

It'll be all right, Hoinck said. Play, he said to Ack, go on play.

I'll be all right, Belle said. A thieves' phrase.

What do you want? Hoinck said. I take it.

What do I want! Belle shouted. Godlordchrist and the Virgin Mary, what do I want!

Cut that out, Hoinck said, what do you think this is? Because you have a fit I'm supposed to call everything off.

I'd better be dead.

Stop saying that. What in the name of God. I'm giving you all I can.

What did you ever give me, living in ratholes from one minute to the next? Stop stealing.

Everybody steals, Hoinck said. My play.

Nuts! There must be some other way.

Well, you know it as well as I do. Hit me. Go on hit me. We tried that.

We're better dead and all our kind.

The men slapped down the cards.

Hoinck yelled: Here's a rod, blow your brains out, or else shut up, and have a drink.

I'll never shut up, Belle screamed. Look, she said to me, I got him extradition papers, got a quick straw bond for him, didn't I? I got him out of jail. I got bail for him. I hitchhiked from Baltimore, Maryland, to Dallas, Texas, to get him out of the can once. I took the rap for him. What else could I do? I might as well blow my brains out.

All right, Hoinck said, do it. If the women would only shut up.

Sure, say nothing. See everything blown to hell and sit quiet knitting. Belle cried. Sure, don't say a thing.

Have a drink.

I'll have a drink. Sure.

Butch came in and walked by me without speaking. He sat down and

watched the game and Belle noticed it too, and she said, What's the matter? Tomorrow we may all be dead and he can't speak to you.

He said, Shut up, Belle, mind your own business. Butch said to me, So you want a father and husband? Well you won't be getting them. Nobody's going to get them.

I stood by the stove.

You want me to bring you something, give you something. Everybody could hear him. You Goddamned chiseler, you lying whore. I wouldn't bring you anything.

The men playing cards looked at me.

Did you have a good lay? he said. Did you have to sell me down the river?

Shut up, Hoinck said. We want to be good for tomorrow.

Yeah, you all know it, Butch said, you all know it. I phoned here and you all knew she was lying up there with that skunk. That lying redheaded bitch.

Belle was laughing, I could hear her laughing. . . . He was drunk. He would have a hangover.

Butch, I said, come with me, come on out. I took hold of him and he came with me easy. I was surprised, he just followed me and we went outside in the hall. We stood against the wall and he put his body close to me. We stood there and I thought he had forgotten. It was good to smell him.

Why in hell did you do it? he said.

I felt cold. Do what? I said.

Instead of answering he struck me full in the face with the flat of his hand. I leaned against the wall. I couldn't see. Then I saw his face awful in front of me as he came toward me and I put out my hand and pushed against his chest and when I touched him I loved him then. Somebody was coming up the stairs. Don't, Butch, I whispered, someone will see. I could see his hand lifted, this time in a fist, and it struck me in the mouth. The man who had been coming up the stairs passed us and I tried to look like nothing had happened. But I couldn't help the blood coming out the side of my mouth.

It's funny to be hit. Nobody ever hit me before but Papa. He didn't hit like that. I took hold of Butch's arm and we went downstairs leaning on each other. It wasn't snowing.

Butch said, It isn't snowing, a good thing too. I hope it don't snow tomorrow.

I hope so too, I said. I could see my mouth. It was swelling. The inside of my lower lip was bleeding where my teeth had cut.

Butch said, What's the matter? Your mouth is bleeding. He said, I'll hit you again, don't ever let me catch you again. Jesuschrist, why did you have to do it?

You told me to do it, I said. You told me to be nice to him.

Sure, go on, blame it on me. That's my fault too. Everything's my fault. That's what my mother used to think. Sure I can take it, go ahead. I'll lead with my chin.

No! No! I cried and we walked along the dark, rotten streets. I didn't know where my legs were and fountains seemed to be rising and breaking behind my eyes. No, no, I cried, it's not your fault. I only thought I'd help with the money.

How much, he said, go on tell me how much?

I hadn't had a single drink but I felt drunk. I could hardly see.

Look, Butch, I said, let's go to a hotel.

Listen, he said, I suppose you think I can't pay for a hotel. I suppose you think only that bloodsucker Ganz can pay for a hotel. Well, I want you to know that I got the dough, see? I can pay. I pay my way. I always done that. I don't depend on no one on God's green earth, get me? Since I was eight years old I paid my way in this lousy world. You're not going to take *this* baby to any hotel. You're not going to pay for me. I can pay for my own room, and for my own girl, see?

Sure, I said, Butch, I know you can. I know that. I've never paid for you. I've never never paid for you.

All right, he said, don't act like it's any different.

Before we went in the hotel on St. Peter, Butch stopped by the pawnshop and took a drink.

Don't drink, Butch, I said, pulling him. Remember in the morning. You got to have your wits.

I suppose you don't think I can drink either. I suppose you think I can't hold it. All right, belittle me, see? Go ahead, I'm used to it. I'll show this cockeyed world.

Sure you will, Butch, sure you will. Oh, I know you will. You're wonderful. You're a good mechanic, you're the best. I know that.

Do you, sweet? Do you?

Sure, sure, I cried. Oh, I love you. I know it is going to be all right.

Do you love me? Honest?

Honest, Butch. Oh, hurry, come on. Sure I love you. Better than anything.

All right, Butch said, that's enough for me. I know when I'm lucky. That's all I need to change my luck. That's absolutely all. I don't need a rabbit's foot. I don't need to take a black girl. I don't need an eleven. I don't need nothing. Tomorrow is going to be silk. Look, he said, you help me get a picture of this. I stand by the pillars, see, until Ganz gets in the side door, then I go in, step over the swinging gate and cover the clerks from the right.

I'll help you, Butch, I cried, pulling him. We'll get it all down.

We went into the lobby and I stood back a little and he signed the register and then he looked in his pants pockets, and then his vest and then all his coat pockets, and he took out a bunch of letters and keys from his back pocket and then he started over and went through them again.

I said, Gee, honey, I forgot you gave me your purse to hold while you were changing the tire. I said, We had a blowout just outside the city, can you imagine, we came clean from Washington, D.C., without a blowout and then just before we get to the city we have one. I put a dollar on the counter and the clerk gave me the key and Butch leaned against me going upstairs and he said what number we got this time? The number on the door was 23.

Twenty-three skiddoo, Butch said. Three and two is five. Five is a lucky number for me. Is it for you?

Yes, I said.

We went in and I didn't turn on the light. I laid Butch on the bed and he went to sleep like a baby. I sat on the edge of the bed. It was an inside room with a shaft. There was no outside window. The window led on the shaft and I could hear men talking in the room above. At first it sounded like wasps and then I heard one of them say, . . . we got to be careful. And another said, . . . but doughnuts is sure.

I didn't want to go to sleep because I dreamed about it every night. I could see it all plain. I've read about robberies but I didn't think anything of it. I have seen it in the papers, banks robbed and pictures of a young man or maybe a girl. I never thought anything of it. I can see myself sitting on the bed dim in the mirror. Tomorrow everyone will know it if we are caught. I am afraid to get up and look close to see if tomorrow already shows in the way I am made. This must show, make the bones go different, and the flesh different.

I am to drive the car. We are to meet Ack at the corner of Third and then we are to part. He is to go across the bridge for the transfer. I am to drive down Fourth and stop in front of the bank just six feet from the hydrant and from there I can see the cop directing traffic on the next corner. I am to watch him and watch behind me in the mirror and keep my foot on the clutch.

I wake up at night and dream that I've forgotten the shift. But that would be impossible. Then I dream I am paralyzed and have become rooted in the walk like when we were kids and put our footprints in the fresh cement. Sometimes it is raining in the dream and sometimes the sun is shining. And I see people broken on the streets by explosion.

It is awful to bear these things at night and horror in your dreams of things unknown to you, not thought of by you at all. I didn't think of these things. It isn't my own evil. I never dreamed of them nor looked to doing any of them. Was I evil? Was I a monster in my youth? Did my mother think of this? Who thought of these crimes and hatched them out to scatter our flesh?

I can see dead on the walk by the corner of that building. I never saw the corner of a building like that before. How far is six feet? How far is it from the door to the car six feet from the hydrant? . . . I must ask Butch to step that many feet for me. I never was good on distance. Distance is very important in this, time and distance. They blow up to big sizes in my dreams. One foot more, one foot back, is the difference of a bullet. One minute more, one second less. I can see all this mixed up in time like a movie when you run it fast and then slow or run it backward.

The voices above said, . . . we got to have racks we got to have a lot of racks to make it pay. Then the voices lowered.

I lay down beside Butch and he put his arm over me. In his sleep he did it. Some voices outside the door must have wakened me. I was dreaming that it came, that moment when Butch was at the front door and Ganz came out the side door with three satchels of money and there were four coppers coming around the corner at the same time. I shot at them and one officer pumped an automatic into Butch. In the light I saw Butch whirl, fire at the officer and then fall in a heap. I lifted a rifle and fired at the fourth officer again and he raised a shotgun and blasted away half my head.

I woke up crying and woke Butch. I said, That's funny, I never fired a gun in my life.

He said, I hope it's clean tomorrow. I feel better. How about something to eat?

I said, You get it. I didn't want to see those streets again.

There was a commotion in the hall. A woman kept saying, Go on get going go on what's the matter. I won't take a thing! she cried, I don't want a thing. Then the man would mumble something like he was moved and ashamed, and then you could hear them kiss and then she shouted, Go on get going get out get going get along, and he didn't want to go. Voices in old hotels at night sound funny, and finally he went back in with her and we could hear them laughing. . . .

Butch turned on the light and killed a bedbug walking up the wall. He wanted to go out and get some beer. It was after twelve. I said, No, you better not drink any more beer. We have to be out there at seven-thirty sharp.

Jesus, maybe we won't wake up, maybe we ought to stay up.

No, we got to get some rest.

He said, Have you got a dime? I'll get you a hamburger. I wait at the front, light a cigarette, lean against the pillars like I was just waiting. I can see through when Ganz gets the clerks covered and then I go in and cover them from the other side.

I said, You put the money out of the drawer on the counter and sweep it into the satchel. Then you take the satchel to Ganz and watch the front door.

Yes, he said, that's right. It can't miss. We ought to make a cleanup.

Yes, I said. We ought to.

Why don't you be easy? he said.

I don't feel easy, I said. I feel awful.

You take everything too personal, he said. Look at me, I can stand anything.

Yes, I said, I'm looking at you. He was still pretty drunk and I knew nothing could keep him from getting drunker, nothing in heaven or hell.

He went out for the hamburger and didn't come back for a long time. They started a party next door. They must make these walls out of paper. I lay in bed listening. I thought if I wouldn't move I wouldn't remember. It was two o'clock. I thought I better get some sleep. I tried to figure things out. I couldn't figure it.

I could hear them through the wall moving like huge rats, like talking rats very funny. I thought they would look like great rats with long snouts and blood hanging from their teeth. The shooting craps and the

loud bad talk went on and the low roar and murmur of men's voices with the cries of the women riding them like birds on a wave.

The clock struck two-thirty and I could feel all this come into me like a misery seeping into you.

I certainly wouldn't forget, if the copper moved, to look across the street, up at the empty windows, and one long and two short. Yes, I would remember that. One long and two short. You might say that on your deathbed. Last words, one long and two short.

Didn't anyone ever go to bed here? Were they all waiting for seven-thirty, for the holdup? The men upstairs kept figuring out how much to start a doughnut racket.

I went downstairs and it was snowing but the black street showed through. I had a cup of coffee and two hot dogs. I only had fifty cents left of the five bucks. I left twenty on the table.

I had only been upstairs ten minutes when Butch knocked and came in with a hot dog still warm in a paper. He was very drunk. He said he had been talking to a fellow who made two thousand a month before the depression. Think of that, he said, two grand a month selling shoes. Jesus!

You better get some sleep, I said, it's near three.

Do you think I can step over that swinging gate O.K.? he said. I'll have to step over it because it will be locked, ten to one.

Sure, I said. How far is six feet from the hydrant?

Don't you know six feet? he said. Look, and he stepped it off from the window to the dresser. Not much smaller than the room. I looked at the space. Space could blow up, it could stretch like rubber.

I tried to eat the hot dog because he brought it.

Butch took off his pants and sat on the bed in his shirt, his strong legs hanging down. He was very drunk. His eyes were glazed.

I put on my coat and ran downstairs and brought up a milk bottle full of coffee. Now I only had fifteen cents left. The coffee cost ten with five deposit for the milk bottle. But that was enough until morning.

Here, I said, drink. I began pounding his arms. You got to eat, I said. You got to sober up.

So, Butch says to the air, I am your father.

Father, I almost screamed. Who was he talking to? A step came down the hall, somebody tiptoeing. He was talking in a low steady voice. The glare of the single bulb fell on his black head.

I held the coffee to his mouth.

I am your father, he says. Go back to the grave, Father, lie still. So, he says, my son, it was better for you not to be alive, it was better for you dead. You wouldn't be a white feather, you would have made the big team. Pitcher for big time, you hear me, that's for certain. My lousy old man wouldn't have known you and you could pitch on Sunday.

Drink, I cried. Drink.

He pushed it away. I was scared. He kept on talking. He wasn't talking to me.

I will talk to you when you are dead, he said, when they lower you in the ground, when everything is dead.

We will have it, I cried, if it goes good tomorrow. Drink. We will have it. You got to sober up.

Too late, he said, it's against us.

No, no, I said. We're lucky.

Luck, he said, that bitch.

He swore to himself, like a wasp ready to plunge into you.

Drink, I shouted, drink. Somebody knocked on the wall. I was shaking like a gourd.

What's the matter? he said. This place smells like a perspiring corpse. Who's been in here? Has that nest robber been in here? I'll kill him.

Drink, I said. You got to be sober tomorrow. You got to be.

He looked at me. If the cop from the corner comes back we are going to be scattered, he said.

Don't think about it. Stop thinking about it.

All right, you stop too.

What time is it?

Almost four.

This time tomorrow we'll be through with it.

It will be all right. Everything will be all right.

Yes.

It won't though. It will be stinking. Lousy.

Don't say that.

Might as well look yourself in the eye.

It will be all right. We'll make it.

We'll be dead.

No, no.

We'll be dead and forgotten.

Oh, we will live forever, I cried.

Sure, nuts, forever. You sweet nut. Come here.

Don't, Butch, you shouldn't. You got to sleep.

Come on now, honey, turn over, turn to me.

Not now.

The man and woman in the other room were laughing in bed. You can hear them strong, through the buggy walls, like grapes hanging in summer, like heavy wheat blowing in Wisconsin.

Now! Now! Butch cried. Before it is too late.

It's funny how anything begins to happen how clear it gets. When it begins to happen you don't worry about it. When you are doing it you don't think about it.

At six-thirty I got Butch out and filled him with black coffee and walked him along the river. The street looked quiet and clear. It was a clear cold morning and it wasn't snowing. I walked him along the river and then he looked better and we went to the tavern and Belle was cooking coffee holding a wrapper over her breast and looking around from the stove. Her ruined face was frightened in a way I never saw it. What a life, she says, get up all hours of the night. Can't sleep a wink. Here's some coffee.

We can't stop, I said.

Oh, yes you can, she says. It's only quarter after seven.

I gave Butch some more coffee and put a little brandy in it.

Ganz came in the kitchen and said, We can't stop here, it will look bad.

You look bad anyhow, Belle said, you look terrible.

All right, no remarks, give me some coffee. What's the matter with him? he said, pointing at Butch.

He's all right, I said.

Hoinck came in, his hair sticking up. He had a bag in his hand.

You can't use that, Ganz said.

What's the matter with it?

Jesus Christ, man, you can't walk in a bank with a satchel like that. What a man!

Shut up, will you? Belle said.

Belle, Hoinck said, get that bag upstairs, will you?

Drink a cup of coffee, baby.

Ganz went into the bar which was still dark.

Don't do it, honey, Belle said.

We'll quit after this, Belle. Don't rag me now, this is a hard one.

At seven-thirty we went out on the street. The car was in front, the one I had driven to have the license changed. I could see in the back, all the guns, rifles and shotguns on the floor.

The men all wore revolvers besides. I could see them under their coats. It made them all look funny.

I got in. Ganz sat beside me and I could feel Butch leaning forward from the back.

Drive easy, girl, Ganz said, like I told you, in the middle of the street so nobody can see in and we don't have to put the curtains down. If we got nabbed now with all this arsenal we'd have to shoot it out.

I hope it's a nice job, Hoinck said, I hope it's clean.

Drive easy, girl. Don't break any rules. Today we're dynamite.

Leave her alone, Butch said.

Who's talking?

I am, Butch said.

I screwed down the window. There was sweat on my head.

Speed between crossings, go slow at the crossing, Ganz said. Stop at all stop signs.

I could see both sides of the street at once like I had extra ways of seeing. A man moving down the street toward us walking to work struck me like a blow and I watched him. Everything looked so single, so clear.

A nice morning, Hoinck said.

It looked like in a show, everything so clear, and the buildings looked like they were painted on. I saw three men talking on the corner. They raised their heads and looked at us. I can see one has a mustache like my father and a thin face. They go on talking. I look back and I can see the back of one's pants come down to a little peak behind like my father's pants always were.

We came across the bridge to meet Ack where we were supposed to meet him with the car that they were to change to and Ack wasn't there.

There was a tire store on the corner. Somebody was inside sweeping the floor.

Where is he? Ganz said. What the hell is this, a kindergarten? We drove around the block and back. He wasn't there.

Don't look, Ganz said. Don't gawk.

I drove around again slow, and back, and the man was still sweeping the floor and he looked up this time.

Don't let him see you, Ganz said, cough in your handkerchief.

I felt like laughing. I didn't have a handkerchief.

We drove around again and this time the man came to the window and looked out at us, his broom in his hand.

I never saw everything before so clear and flat, as if it was the end of it, as if you could never get behind or around or even remember it. Like there was no place to go into, to hide. It was crazy. I kept saying to myself, There's still time, we can stop now. Ganz leaned forward, looking up and down the street. I could feel Butch at my back. I could see him there. I could see him plain.

I could see the street, tiny and sharp in the mirror behind me.

The police squad car was coming behind us. I saw it. I said, The squad car is coming behind us.

Ganz said, For Christ's sake!

I said, Sit still, look natural. It's nothing. They are going back to headquarters, around the block.

Ganz was white as a sheet. You're not so brave, I said to him. You're a rat.

The squad car drove alongside and past us and the two tired cops didn't even look at us.

It's a quarter of eight, Ganz said. What does he think this is?

He'll be here, Hoinck said.

Get off this street, Ganz said. Get the hell out of here, we'll drive a few blocks and come back. Get out of here, get off this street, get away, Ganz said.

All right, Butch said, you can speak decent to her.

To who? Ganz said. Don't be too sure about that.

What do you mean? Butch said.

Be still, I said. There's Ack. I could see him a block ahead.

Tail in half a block behind, Ganz said.

He saw us, I said. All we need to do is just pass him so he knows we're set.

O.K. We drove back to the tire store and Ack leaned out a little and raised his hand. I raised my hand.

Stop, Ganz said. I pulled alongside. It wasn't necessary. Where you been? Ganz said in a whisper. Where you been?

Never mind, Hoinck said, let's go.

Tell you later, Ack said.

All right, Hoinck said, let's take a gander at it, get it over with. It's not too late. We'll get something . . .

Make it snappy, Ganz said.

The streets were beginning to have more cars. I drove fast. I drove very well. I turned down Fourth and drove slowly around the corner. I saw the cop a block ahead directing traffic like we knew he would be. When I saw the hydrant I jumped as if it was looking at me. I remembered the wall of the bedroom. I stopped five feet away.

I turned and looked at Butch and he smiled at me. I felt better.

The lights were on in the bank and we could see in clear. The doors weren't open yet. The sun struck across the pillars just like the morning we cased it. I left the engine running. Butch got out easy and just then I could see the steel vault opening.

There it goes! both Hoinck and Ganz said. Ganz opened the door, took out his brief case and walked around the car and back around the corner.

Hoinck got out and slowly followed him. Butch was leaning up against the pillar, taking a cigarette out of the pack. He looked natural. Everything looked terribly natural. I saw the woman secretary clean off the desk of the president. She had a white lace collar on, very neat. The clerks came out with locked trays which they took to the cages and opened, sorting the bills into the open drawers.

I felt almost happy, as if I knew all this would happen and now it was happening just like it should. I could feel my heart beating high up in me. A woman walked by Butch and he looked at her. I watched him look at her.

He put his hand up to his face so she couldn't see him clear. I remembered his saying, Cover your face, honey, or I'll see you in the papers.

I saw Ganz inside.

Butch, I said softly to myself, just moving my lips, and as if he heard me he threw his cigarette into the gutter and turned his face and went through the pillars into the bank. I could see the long hard nervous cat life in him. It was lonely now on all sides.

Now I couldn't tell what time it was, whether an hour passed or a minute. I felt lightheaded. A man walked by and looked at me and I thought his eyes got larger.

It was very queer. Not many people seemed to be on the street. The cop kept turning full face to me and then sideways as the traffic went by him. I kept my foot on the clutch. I could see my foot far down as if it had gone to sleep. I couldn't feel it, as if it had been cut off and was lying down there.

GET SET TO GO. Words kept going in my mind. GET THE HOT HEAP READY. TAKE OFF IN A MINUTE. SPEED SPEED THAT'S IT LIKE HITLER.

I looked at the street behind, tiny in the mirror. I could see the buildings slanting a little, and darkening.

I said to myself for Butch, Step over the counter, counter ends at avenue window, small gate there, step over it, you're tall, darling, step over it. Clerks and money drawers will be in line with you, cover them. Motion them back, give them their orders, keep them away from the alarms. Don't forget anything, Butch, and if they hit it and start the big buzzer, remember that's a lot of battle for us for sure, that's for sure. Be careful. Clean the drawer now as you come to each cage, throw the dough onto the counter and push it into the bag. That's right.

Hoinck has vaulted the other end at the second pay window. . . .

I didn't look in. The big windows flashed now like glasses in the sun.

A dog started across the street and stopped. He's afraid too, I thought, and he went back to the curb and stood by the hydrant and then lifted a leg.

I turned my head and looked at the door. I could see Butch standing by the door. Now Butch had emptied the drawers, given the satchel to Ganz, now he was watching the door. Don't let anybody in, Butch. Watch it!

A stout man with a brief case was let out on the corner. A pretty girl was driving the car. She said, Good-by, Father. . . . He pulled down his vest and pushed up his mustache with his fat finger, walked toward me without looking, and turned in between the pillars. Butch saw him too and when he got in the door, I saw his head disappear like he had been dropped.

Everything was quiet. I could see the bank so clear like it was made of ice with the sun moving a little over the pillars, such lovely pillars.

Another man got out of a car that stopped alongside. A chauffeur was driving. He got out, slammed the door, threw away a cigar and went toward the streak of light between the pillars.

I watched now like it was something in a story, something I was reading. He went inside and then almost instantly he ran out fast and squealing in a high voice like a stuck pig. Everything on the street changed. Someone was running. I raced the engine. I felt lightheaded. I could see the air.

Then it broke like glass all around me and I heard the guns go off and the repeater Ganz carried, and two single sharp cracks, and the cop on the corner whirled like a doll, and then it was still again with people running.

Butch came backward out the bank door. I kept my eyes on him. He came out with his back to me, and he was holding his side. He was bent over and then he straightened, turned toward me and ran four steps, then he turned again facing the door of the bank, through which people were running. I kept my eyes on the back of his head as he moved toward me. I raced the engine and when he was near I took hold of the door handle and opened the door. I held it open until I saw his head and the backs of his ears, close to me.

People seemed to be running past him into the bank. No one seemed to be paying any attention to him. I held the door until he backed into it, then he opened it and got in. I could see the street in front of me and in back of me in the mirror and everyone was running toward the bank.

I raced the engine and when he closed the door I threw in the shift, grating it a little because my foot had gone to sleep.

Butch said, They're both dead.

I didn't know who. I didn't ask him. I hoped it was Ganz anyway. No one seemed to notice us. I drove down to the end of the street, turned down the river hill. I drove fast and over the bridge without thinking because that was the way I was supposed to go. I drove very fast and I could see very well. Everything looked very clear, like on a morning after a storm. I was over the bridge on the way to meet Ack before I thought of it and then when I realized it I turned off the road and kept going until we came to the country. Then I looked at Butch. He was very white and he was holding his side. I slowed up. Let me look. I pulled back his coat and his side looked like a tree that had been struck by lightning. He was almost split in two, the skin stripped down like bark.

I knew now nobody was following us. I couldn't figure it. I didn't even try to figure it, I just drove on as fast as I could but not too fast. I took off my coat. Put that on your side, I said, and try to stop the blood.

Where are we going now? he said. It don't much matter now, does it, go on blame me. I got you into this, go on blame me, I can take it.

Don't say anything, I said, it makes it worse.

We were driving through flat lands. I hoped we were going south. I tried to keep to the little roads so we wouldn't be seen but I knew nobody was following us.

Well, you were right, go on tell me you were right. This is a fine end to come to.

We aren't coming to any end, I said.

He didn't say anything and it scared me.

We kept on driving and after a while he said, We haven't got a bit of the haul. Nobody following us and we haven't a thing. After all that and not a thing. That bastard Ganz made it all up so he would carry the money. I could of just as well had a satchel but he would carry the money. It could have been every man with a satchel and his chances.

He seemed excited. I couldn't keep him from talking. I felt better now than I felt before the holdup. I felt light as if I had dropped about a hundred pounds. He kept on talking and I was scared. I thought he was getting delirious now.

There was a short fellow at the bar, he said, in a black mackinaw. He had a pointed nose and he was always having a fine time. He died of rot gut but he had a good time while it lasted. And he said, what kind of a cup is this? The chalice of McCarthy—he was a card—that was McCarthy's saloon, and he said, this is the chalice of McCarthy. I am going to wear a green tie, he said, if I have to bust a gut. I won't buy beer for any sons of guns that are drunk. If you are sober you need a beer—oh, he was a card all right—but if you are drunk you don't need a beer. He was the greatest gambler in town, used to gamble with Joe Hill and he knew what it was all about and he knew the cards were stacked. He told me then—Butch, he said, the cards are marked—when I was just a punk, he told me that, but I was smart—I was pretty smart all right.

There was no use to tell him to be quiet now. I had to find someplace to take him. I thought, Should I take him to a doctor? I was afraid to take him. It seemed like we were against everybody now.

Now we haven't got a thing, Butch said. After all that, and all that money in my hands, I can still feel it, what we could have done with even a little bit of that sweet money.

You're alive, I said.

He looked at me.

I was thinking, he said, standing by them pillars before we went in, when that girl went by, there was a few seconds there, I could have walked out then, we could have lived our lives like you wanted. I could have walked out of there then.

Don't talk, I said. I kept on driving through the country, going around the towns and villages. I just kept on going and I got out and took the extra gasoline can out and filled the tank and took off my petticoat and dipped it in a river and washed his side, and put the skirt in along the wound.

I kept driving and nobody was coming after us now for sure, and we must have been about a hundred and fifty miles by afternoon and the land was very flat and I thought maybe we were in Iowa, and it seemed so flat I looked at the sun and turned east because I had a crazy idea we would drive into the dark quicker and maybe get into Missouri or some wooded country. It was frightening to see it so flat with no place to go but into the ground.

I kept driving and nobody was coming after us. Farmers' wives came out and stood at the door. We drove past like lovers. Butch looked all right from the chest up and he leaned a little against me. The women stood in the doors of their houses, and children looked out the windows. All wives are beautiful.

I did everything just like we planned it, Butch said. I couldn't catch hold of that fat bastard, he slipped out of my hands like a greased pig. He let out an awful squeal.

I heard him, I said. Don't talk. I'm going to stop now and get some gas before it is dark. Sit up, I said, pull that coat around.

You don't think it was my fault, do you? Butch said. I mean the whole mess.

No, I said, it wasn't your fault. You couldn't help it, any of it. Be still now.

I drove into a service station. Five gallons, I said. Could we fill our can too, we are going camping?

Sure, he said, going south?

Yes, I said. Maybe it's warm in Arkansas. I hoped we were going toward Arkansas.

It didn't surprise him. Yes, he said, good hunting down there too.

He took our can from the back seat. It was a service station built like a cottage. There were paper geraniums at the window.

This is a swell place you got here, Butch said.

The young man looked at us and went inside.

How much money you got, Butch?

I got a fiver Ganz gave me for gas, he said.

Good, I said, that's one thing Ganz did that was O.K.

The young man came out and Butch said again that it was a fine place he had. He looked at us. Oh, yes, he said, wiping the windshield. Butch and I leaned together so he wouldn't see.

I put everything me and my wife had into this place, he said, and now the oil company is going to take it away from me.

How can they do that, Butch said, didn't you get a lease on it?

Oh, sure, he said, that's a racket. They make you feel like you got your place, like you're going to be the boss, a big shot. They take all your dough and they got it fixed so you can't make good. You could work twenty-eight hours out of twenty-four, you could starve your wife and kids and throw them in with it. They got you milked from both ends. It's a racket. They hold the cards. You can't win. And when you give up, when they've sucked you dry, they get another sucker.

Holy mackerel, Butch said.

It was getting night. He gave us the change and when we drove on down the road Butch began to swear. I never heard him swear like that.

Butch, I said, don't.

Oh, the Goddamned dirty bastards. They got you coming and going. They got you.

Be quiet, I said. Be quiet.

I had to stop somewhere. It was getting dark.

Once it began to snow a little and I was disappointed. I thought we were going south. I hoped we were going south.

I knew if we drove long enough we would come to a river and rivers always have dark places near them, caves and trees.

Butch got very delirious. I couldn't see him but all the time I was looking for some place to drive into I could hear him talking.

Yes, Butch said, honey, it's got to show pretty soon. Where are we going? It's got to show soon. What are we looking forward to? You got to believe in the future. I knew a man, he wasn't my father, but he said, Son, I can't tell you anything but you will find out something. You'll learn something. He wasn't my father but he told me that. I wouldn't pay him no mind. I was a cocky buck.

We were coming to some trees and rolling hills. It was nice to drive into them and not see any road behind. I drove as good as I could and not jar him.

No, he wasn't my father, Butch said. Do I owe my father any grief? Answer me that, he said. You don't owe your father anything. Here we are kicked around all our lives, what do you owe your father, spawning you in it? He began to sing. It sounded terrible. I cried a little so he wouldn't know it. He began to sing like he was drunk, to the tune of *The Star-Spangled Banner:* My father's gone to sea of thee I sing. . . . This is a dirty day, he said, a hell of a day. . . .

My mother, he said. She was the darnedest bawler out and had all

those kids, Lord, there were kids everywhere like a brood of chicks. And where are mine? Where's my son? He'd make the big team, wouldn't he? He wouldn't be a white feather. Got to take the old carcass somewhere. I sleep anywhere, don't worry about that, I can sleep anywhere. I'm pretty sleepy. Hell, nobody'll bother you. One summer I slept in the morgue every night. Now that's a good place. Joe at the morgue don't like to stay alone with all the stiffs and it's cold in summer, it's about the coolest place in summer, crawl up on a nice cool slab.

Joe was godshakes once, going for a fare-you-well. It burnt him up. That's the trouble, you burn up. You don't bail out soon enough. I never saw anybody get out soon enough to save his hide. Joe was runner up. He used to track around como and rice in winter. I'd be coming down driving the truck, all bent out of shape with my kidneys killing me, and there'd be Joe warming up running like a dog. You can't hurt him now. Why should I be quiet? Can't I even speak? He's been knocked over so often his brains are addled. Jock Malone started a gym, that was a long time ago. Once Joe came back to town with a Packard. Boy, oh, boy, that was something. And then he didn't have a Packard, just like that, and I met him staggering down Fourth with a breath—Got a nickel? he hollers, and him in the big money not six months before. You see, that's the way it goes, in again, out again Finnegan. Got a nickel? he hollers. Damn if I know, I says, shake me and if you hear anything we'll split. Found a quarter and we split. My girl wants to go to a show, he says, and I went with him and I slept until a guy came along with a broom. That was another blank, that's all. I've got a lot of blanks. I draw a lot of blanks. You gotta have. My mind doesn't register now. Have I been knocked over?

No, I said, you're all right, Butch.

I saw a bridge ahead and I thought, There will be a road on the other side going down, to the river.

I know the porter at the Union Station, Butch said, he would help us. I know where you can get nigger gin. He would get us some. Five cents a pint, lay you in lavender for a week. And Mabel Martino the check girl is half baked, short and plump, keeps herself fried. It would help, wouldn't it?

No, I said, we're all right.

Oh, we're fit as a fiddle, he shouted, and began to sing. The bellboy was drunk, he said, and started to lean where the old courthouse was and it was gone, the bells are gone now. I better hit the hay, honey. Come

down close. This old carcass better get someplace, take this old carcass home, wherever that is. . . .

We'll be home, I said, and I drove across the bridge and turned to the left where the road went straight down in the brush by the river. It was a dirt road and I drove very slow and eased the car down the frozen ruts. I stopped and turned off the lights.

Butch said, Don't do that, don't make it dark, and I turned them on again.

Once, he said, we were coming into Oshkosh between games and there I saw two ballplayers at the bar. One was a guy named Pinkey. It was mahogany beams, pretty swanky. Pinkey said, Hello, boy, I'm in the big money, I'm staying at the Fondulac over here. There was O'Leary and he was in the big money too and we had some drinks. We had gin rickies. Pinkey had pockets full of money his old man just kicked off beside.

Say, he said, this must be the road to my mother's. My mother's goofy now. I used to go see the old girl. It seemed to cheer her up so to see her best effort, this son of Erin. Does it cheer you up?

Yes, it does. I began to go on slow. Sometimes there are old shacks along a river.

Gee, he said, when I remember it when I was young. I thought this old world couldn't live without me. Honest. I thought men couldn't live without me. I worked up until I was head of the route. I had to be in the alley back of the *News* at four o'clock in the morning. I thought I was doing a swell job. I didn't think they could get the paper out without me. Honest. I thought I was a public servant. I was a goof. Now a woman's got to give me food, hand-feed me . . .

Charlie had three fingers from N. Y. came from Miami by freight. We flipped. Charlie and I had to sleep together, Red started telling about his kids. He was a steel worker too saved money and lived in a house and paid so much a month a steel-rivet man worked with a boy friend didn't have to push the bell button often to warn the men below they always worked together Sam fell off the fifty-fourth floor of the Empire State. Shouted I'm going down. I tried to grab his leg. All I could do then was ring bells. I had a pretty big funeral. All the gang. I felt terrible. I worked with different fellows . . . worked in factories. In October I met Charlie again he was a sight didn't care about anything but Baby Ruth candy bars. . . .

Remember my brother?

Yes, I said.

Bill was used to it. When he was a punk he climbed the company poles to fix wires in every kind of a gale so the hairs on his belly would freeze from the sweat of his armpits. I remember I met Bill. When I heard he was born I pulled up my didy and went out to give him howdy and welcome to this mortal coil and he was growing about one foot out of the linoleum in the kitchen and I was a little bigger than him. We had another boon companion named Sad Eye Morton and he was a bad boy. We were not good boys but he was a bad boy. Where are you going?

I'll be back, I said. I got out easy and tried to prop him up. I thought I would walk down the road and look in the thicket. I walked down in the light. I could hear the river on my left. I saw a path and I turned off. It led to a shack close by the banks. I ran back and I could hear Butch still talking. I got in.

Butch said, He was the greatest tipper over of outhouses and feeler under women skirts and now he is a bank teller, very respectable, it just goes to show. Maybe he was that fat little squealing pig that got out of my hands.

I said, We are almost there.

Where? he said.

I drove into a clearing where a car had been before.

I feel like my old man's feet that time, Butch said.

How? I said.

Well, I was wandering around and the old man was sick and I happened to see his dogs sticking out of the bottom of the bed so I felt them and they were stone-cold. The old man's feet were like stones. I told my old lady that and she let out a yell. It turned out he was dead.

I said, You'll have to help me. We are going to get out now.

I'll help you, he said, I'll do anything you say.

All right, I said. I opened the other door. You'll have to put your good arm around me.

Why, that's easy, he said, that's a pleasure. Why, that's co-operation.

I left the lights on and they pierced the bare winter trees that looked like the beard of a man.

When I got him on the cot in the shack his whole side was a big mouth opening and shutting, with his shirt and coat caked in it. I ran down and took off my undershirt and broke the thin ice and dipped it in the

water and ran back putting it under my armpits to warm it. I hated to put it on so cold. I put the cloth in and I didn't know how that mouth could ever be closed.

I went to get some wood because it was cold. I ran in the brush like mad. Some of it wouldn't go in without the stove door staying open but that was nice. I could watch Butch by the light of it.

He didn't say anything now. He slept and I watched to see that he was breathing. It was his being so quiet made me know.

Once he said, You better drive on, honey, and leave me here.

I found an old stew pot and boiled some water. It seemed like it had been night for a long time. I thought I should have taken him to a doctor before. I must have been insane. Why didn't I do it? I thought, As soon as it is light I will do it.

We did everything O.K., Butch said, except that bastard slipped out of my hands like a greased pig. If it hadn't been for him.

Something else would have happened, I said.

It was funny, Butch said, there was a fat lady clerk and I told her to get down on the floor and when I was getting out of there to the door I almost stepped on her face and she looked at me. I didn't plan it, Butch said.

What? I said. Now he was going to tell it.

Take it on the natural out, Ganz told us. That's what I did. I came out of there natural and nobody followed us, I did that O.K., didn't I?

Yes, I said.

Well, just before that little pig came in Ganz said O.K., boys, take it on the natural, get out now, natural, walk easy, get that dough in the car. Hoinck had one satchel from the vault and Ganz had the one I gave him. The way I doped it sometime in my sleep was that Ganz was figuring with Hone to get all the dough one way or another.

Yes, I figured that too, I guess.

Ganz saw the pig slip out of my hands all right and he turned and I saw Hoinck fall as he was making for the door and it was Ganz shot Hoinck straight through the heart from the back. It was Ganz. Hoinck fell by the door. I saw him. He was so big and he just fell like he was cracked from behind. Ganz took the money on the run from his hand so he had both satchels and I took aim and shot him in the back.

I didn't say anything. I took his hand.

I saw him and I shot him. I never liked to look at him from behind.

All right, I said, neither did I .

And he kind of twisted around spinning to the floor and he saw me and raised his automatic and shot the whole wad. Ganz could shoot straight but I guess I got him bad.

All right, I said, try and sleep.

Sleep, he said, I been sleeping all my life. My God, do we belong to the human race or don't we?

Some people don't think so, I said.

To hell with them, I feel so tired.

Sleep, I said.

I had found a bottle of whisky in the car. I put some in the hot water and made him drink it and I drank some. I began to rub his body. The bleeding had stopped but he was spitting blood like he was bleeding inside. I rubbed him all over slow, his feet, his thighs, his neck and shoulders. I thought of everything he ever told me.

His body had been good to me. It seemed like there was everything else bad and our bodies good and sweet to us. He said, Get in beside me, I'm so cold. I got in with him and put our coats over us and he held on to me and if I would move he would draw me back. It was a narrow cot and I felt the fever mount in him. Sometimes he talked serious and I talked to him.

I haven't been good to you.

You've been good to me, I said, the best.

I hate it the way my brother looked when he was dead. I went out and I saw him face down in the gutter, and when I turned him over he looked at me.

*There was Rafferty traveled and got his expenses paid, two thousand a month think of that met big men too. It brings the best out in you Rafferty used to say, ten years in hotels the best hotels give a tip of one dollar as easy as sneezing. I saw his report it was two thousand for one month what we couldn't do with that in one year even if we had it. The boy's doing well. I hope he makes a million.*

Butch, I said, you know it wasn't anything with Ganz.

I know, Butch said, don't think about it. We're trapped, honey.

Don't say anything.

This would happen anyway, he says, the sooner the better, eventually why not now? We couldn't do anything we didn't do. We put everything into it like they say. We shot the works. It was all in the cards.

Don't think of anything now, I said, and began rubbing his back.

I haven't done you much, he said.

Oh, you're good, I said. Haven't I done what you said, gone with you, followed you?

Yes, he said, you're sweet.

*What was I doing all my life?* Butch said. *What was I doing, what in high heaven and low hell was I up to? St. Peter Street, Wabasha, St. Paul 3rd and 4th and 5th. Remember Hogan's used to be up two flights and in the back and Rifle Joe's and Dodo? What in God's name? Three-story stone building that's Belle's, I recognize that an old stone building can be sweet saloon tailorshop restaurant fruit stand hotel upstairs, rubber word off a red globe in the entrance the alley was a blind remember that. Smell of sour whisky, rotten fruits, horses, catgut and beer. I worked in a hat factory on that second floor when I was a punk you didn't know me then I hadn't slept with you then I was looking for you the girls used to hang out their towels in the hotel and we bet on how many towels that was the first thing I bet on and the machines made a steady one two stop one two you got so you liked it you could jig it we used to do it.*

We both fell asleep. He woke me shouting: *What have they done to this, what have they done to this now? Where are the oats, the wheat? I was sure they were planted. Look, Mrs. Hinckley, the wealth of the country, the iron ore wheat with my body I thee wed, with my worldly goods I thee endow. . . . What are they doing to you now, honey? They own the town. They own the earth and the sweet marrow of your body. Watch out they'll shoot at you from all the windows and blow up the town.*

*All my life there what in hell was I doing? Who said anything? What happened? Going around those streets year in and year out boy and man, those narrow dark godriddendevil haunted whorish drunken grand streets upstairs and downstairs O Christ my God my heavens good morning good evening with nothing Christ was it who made it what got us we come to this bad end.*

Be quiet, I said.

We didn't mean any of this, we didn't think of any of this, he screamed.

I couldn't make him quiet now. He talked about other things, some he had told me and some of it he hadn't. He thought of all the people he knew ending up with me and then he died.

It was Saturday night then. I tried not to go through towns. I tried to keep going south. Butch sat beside me on the seat like he was asleep.

He was cold when you touched him and the blood had stopped. I was glad of that. A scab closed his mouth.

I was going south but the cold was like the little teeth of Belle's cat going into your skin, sharp. I had to wear Butch's coat. I was frightened once, I thought I heard a shot, but then I saw it was a laundry truck parked by the road and the driver was up in the hill, shooting. I didn't want to hear it.

I went slow, and all night on Saturday I passed parties and taverns and I could see the girls sitting in the cars with their fellows. Towards morning the roads got empty except for drunken boys, driving from hell to breakfast, just like I was doing, and I saw a bar hill rise towards the sky and I drove into a field of shocked corn. It seemed nice, the round prairie hill. Like a mound.

It must have taken a long time for me to get him over my shoulder like a jackknife. It got a little lighter and some cows came and looked at me. The grasses at the top of the mound were tall and made a soft shhhhh where I laid him on his side, because I couldn't bend him now, and a black beard had started on his face.

I got the blanket and I covered him and I left him there.

# ANOTHER LANGUAGE

by

Charles A. Fenton

The American correspondent wandered uneasily around the airdrome for several days. Nothing was quite as he had expected. He was a literate, sophisticated journalist of considerable experience, and naturally he had scarcely expected a Royal Air Force station to be strictly Hollywood; but, hell, surely one could reasonably hope for some sort of excitement. Everyone strolled about, cheerio, good show, have a drink, old boy. Airplanes took off, landed, he saw bombs being trundled across the field, but where the hell was his story, where was the drama of a beleaguered island holding out alone against Hitler? They wouldn't even take him up in the air till the Air Ministry O.K.'d it. Hell. He climbed the steps to the wooden Control Tower.

"Morning," he said.

The Control Officer turned away from the window. "Hello, old boy. How are you today?"

"Fine. What's new?"

"Same old stuff." He waved a hand toward the neat, almost bare desk, where an official-looking document lay face down on the blotter. "Ops tonight. Just got the dispatch from a motorbike bloke."

"What's the target?"

"Oh, we shan't know that till teatime. Security, you know."

"Well," said the correspondent a trifle bitterly, "what do they tell you in that damn dispatch that comes by motorbike bloke?"

"Just to get so many kites on the top line for a show tonight. Then

they send us a code signal this afternoon, with the target, and we brief the crews after tea."

"Saves leaks that way, eh?"

"That's it." The Control Officer fumbled for his cigarette case. "Oh, I nearly forgot. We got the word on you from Ministry this morning."

"You mean I can fly?"

"As much as you like."

"Christ, that's great. Oh, I'm sorry. Here, have a Chesterfield."

"Well, I shan't say no to that."

"Here, take the pack. Can I go with them tonight?"

"Well, I don't know as I'd advise that, old boy."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, only the Polish crews are flying tonight, you see."

"What of it? They're going to Germany, aren't they?"

"Oh, they're going to Germany, all right. Too true. But, well, they're not exactly representative of the RAF, if you know what I mean. And as I understand it, you're after a story about a typical RAF show, aren't you?"

"Sure, but these Poles are in the RAF, aren't they?"

"Well, yes and no. Come here a moment. Perhaps I can show you what I mean." He led the American newspaperman over to the huge window that faced the field. "Here's one of the Polish kites now, see there, with the letter J on the fuselage? Going to do an air test."

"Air test?"

"Checking his machine, instruments, et cetera, before tonight's show."

"Oh."

The loudspeaker on the wall began to crackle as the Polish wireless operator tested the two-way aircraft to Control radio. "J for Johnny testing. J for Johnny testing. One, two, three, four, one, two, three, four. Over to you." The wireless operator spoke English with a harsh, broken accent, and the American sensed that he was speaking a memorized set of phrases. The Control Officer had picked up his own microphone.

"Control to J for Johnny. Control to J for Johnny. You are coming in loud and clear. You are coming in loud and clear. Over to you. Over."

A second voice broke in from the aircraft, speaking rapidly in what the American vaguely recognized as Polish. "That's the pilot speaking now," said the Control Officer. "Probably checking with his crew before take-off, making sure the gunners are in their turrets, that sort of thing." There was a moment of silence and then they could hear several new

voices speak briefly, again in Polish, and then the pilot said, in the same halting English the wireless operator had used: "J for Johnny. May I take off?"

"Control to J for Johnny. You may take off. Over."

"Thank you." There was a loud snap as the radio was switched off, and the aircraft, which by this time had taxied to the end of the field, swung abruptly onto the runway as the pilot throttled his port engines; and while the Control Officer sighed heavily, the Pole opened his starboard engines and roared down the cement runway.

"You see what I mean?" the Englishman asked the correspondent.

"No."

"Well, a pilot should check overhead carefully before taking off, for incoming aircraft, he should turn *slowly* onto the runway, and he should open up his throttles gradually as he begins his take-off. But, now, watch his actual take-off, and you'll certainly see what I mean."

The four-engined bomber was halfway down the runway now, just beyond the intersection of the north and south landing strips, when suddenly the American realized the undercarriage had been drawn up. The plane, therefore, though its speed had not increased appreciably, now became an aircraft risen some twenty feet in the air rather than an aircraft that had simply completed half of its take-off.

"See? The bastard is now airborne." The Control Officer wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. "It never ceases to shake me. It's the easiest way I know of to thoroughly prang a heavy bomber. And yet, do you know the Poles have never had a single crackup in four months of flying with this Squadron?"

"Why did he take off that way? It seems silly."

"It is silly. That's precisely what I meant; they do silly things. You see, like most of the Polish pilots who got to England in '40, that chap used to be a fighter boy. Flew Spitfires during the Battle of Britain. Then they needed bomber pilots, when the RAF began to go on the offensive early this year, so they were converted to four-engined stuff." The Control Officer watched the aircraft climb out of sight. "Well, Spitfires took off that way in 1940 and '41. They had to get in the air in a hurry, you see, and you could do it with reasonable safety in a kite as light as a Spit." He spread his hands helplessly. "So they still do it in a Stirling, with a fourteen-ton load."

"How many Polish crews have you got on this Squadron?"

"Five. The other eleven crews are all English or Dominion. But don't

get me wrong. The Poles are definitely amongst our best crews. They bomb with incredible accuracy, and they'll press an attack through the worst kind of flak. And we've had Poles actually *chase* German fighters in Stirlings."

"I think they're crazy," said the American. "But I'd like to go with them tonight."

"Right," said the Control Officer. "It's your funeral, as you Americans say." He laughed heartily.

"Have another Chesterfield and don't be so damn morbid." The American felt better than he had since he came on this assignment to England. He was going to get a story. Poles in the Royal Air Force. Men without a country, their own air force shattered, flying desperately against the rapist of their native land. Heroes of the Battle of Britain now lashing back at the Ruhr. Mercenaries who held the world together . . . What the hell was the poem by Housman? He left the Control Tower, whistling, headed for the mess, to write his lead paragraphs.

He was introduced to the Polish pilot, a Flight Lieutenant, at tea, and was taken by the pilot to the briefing in the Intelligence Room, where he was introduced in turn to the other six members of the crew.

They were all NCO's, with the exception of the pilot, stocky, tough-looking young men with broad mouths and high cheekbones. They reminded him of the hunkies with whom he had gone to high school, back in Pittsburgh. Perhaps among this crew were cousins or nephews of some of his classmates. It was an angle for his story.

Conscientiously he tried to sort out the six men in his mind. Wireless operator, flight engineer, tail gunner, that short chap with the mustache, older than the rest, mid-upper gunner, just a kid, and the navigator, a Warrant Officer who appeared better educated and more aristocratic than the rest of the crew.

"Don't you carry a second pilot?" he asked the Flight Lieutenant.

"Too short of pilots." The Pole grinned. "You will be our second pilot." They listened intently to the Intelligence Officer, who was describing the target and route. Munich. Munich, thought the correspondent, birthplace of the Nazi Party. Wonderful angle. He saw that the Poles were happily nudging one and other.

"Munich," the navigator whispered to the pilot. "A full load of petrol." The pilot nodded but said nothing, and the American was left to wonder about the significance of a full load of petrol.

"This is a major show," the Intelligence Officer was saying sternly. "Seven hundred and fifty aircraft are to take part in it. Munich is the target. Munich," he repeated, glaring at the Poles. The Poles nodded docilely. "All right, then, that's about all, I think. Take-off at seven. Good luck."

The five Polish crews left the Intelligence Room, talking excitedly in Polish, followed by the American. Outside, they piled in the truck and were driven to the perimeter track that ran around the field. The crews were dropped off at the dispersal point which held their own aircraft. "Here," said the Flight Lieutenant finally, and the correspondent jumped off with the pilot and his crew. The tail gunner found him a parachute and a Mae West, which he put on over his flying suit, and showed him how to work the harness and buckle on the chute, a chest pack.

"Do not worry," said the gunner. "We have no trouble." He pointed with pride to the nose of the huge, ugly aircraft, and the American saw the rows of tiny bombs painted on the fuselage. He walked over and counted them.

"Fifty-seven missions?"

The gunner nodded vigorously. "And what are those little swastikas?" said the American, pointing at the dozen or so Nazi symbols that were painted below the miniature bombs.

The Pole swept his hands around expressively in pantomime of a man firing machine guns. "Jerries," he said. "Bloody Jerries. We shoot down."

"Oh, I see." They climbed into the aircraft, and the correspondent followed the pilot up to the cabin and took the copilot's seat indicated by the Flight Lieutenant. Plugging in his earphones, he heard the wireless operator testing with Control, and then the roar of the engines drowned out his voice. They began to taxi rapidly down the field, now shadowy with the early, winter darkness. The Aldous lamp in the tower flashed what the American identified as the Morse signal for *J*, and the aircraft swung heavily onto the runway and began its take-off. The pilot touched a button and a sudden lurch in his stomach told the correspondent they were again airborne by simply touching the wheels. He was pleased the Control Officer had explained the trick to him; it made a good lead for his story. The pilot spoke over the intercom.

"Course, please."

"049 degrees, sir." It was the precise, educated English of the navigator. The pilot turned onto his course, carefully adjusting a compass set by his right knee, and the American wondered briefly if 049 degrees

wasn't a bit north for Munich. Probably they were taking a two-legged route to the target, to avoid fighters. He watched the Flight Lieutenant draw the blackout curtains across the cabin's side windows. He did the same himself, and sat back in his seat, nervously fingering the clumsy oxygen mask from time to time. He heard a voice he recognized as the tail gunner's.

"Test guns, please, sir."

"Right," said the pilot. The American started as from the rear came the rapid clack-clack of the four guns in the tail turret. "Guns bloody O.K.," said the tail gunner. A flash of tracer dropped across the bow as the front gunner tested his guns, and then the correspondent heard a third set of Brownings from amidships.

"All turrets O.K., sir," said the tail gunner. The navigator gave the pilot an alteration of course. "What's the matter?" said the American.

"Wind has changed," the pilot told him. "Over the water now." He pointed down, and the American nodded. Soon he saw several searchlights penciling the dark sky. "Boulogne," the pilot explained. They flew well to the south of the French town. The correspondent looked at his wrist watch some time later, as they flew steadily above the blacked-out Continent. Nine-forty-five. They should reach Munich soon. Almost three hours airborne; the time had gone quickly. The pilot jabbed him on the shoulder, pointing ahead, and the American saw a mass of searchlights, playing aimlessly about the sky some ten miles ahead of them.

"Berlin," said the pilot.

"What!"

"Berlin." The pilot pointed to the petrol gauge and grinned. "Bags of petrol, so we go to Berlin. The capital. All the best Nazis in Berlin."

"Munich," said the American weakly. "You're supposed to be going to Munich."

The pilot shrugged his shoulders. "Seven hundred fifty kites at Munich tonight. Five Poles will not be missed." He spoke rapidly in Polish, then pushed the wheel forward. The aircraft lunged downward, accumulating speed. The American caught his breath as he watched the air-speed indicator rise. They were in the lights now, and he could hear the batteries on the ground. He saw the gray smudges of flak in front of them, and the bright tracer of the lighter guns.

"Flak, port bow quarter," said the front gunner stolidly. "Fifty yards."

"Thank you," said the pilot. He swerved sharply and then, as the flak increased, he began to throw the aircraft violently from side to side in

reckless evasive action. The correspondent's mouth was dry and his throat hurt, and as he threw up on his knees he thought dully, I can't write this story, nobody would believe it. He saw with real horror that the altimeter showed them to be now down to 1000 feet, and there were machine guns firing at them. The searchlights played helplessly above them, their operators unable to depress them further, and the flak smudges, too, were well above them. The aircraft heeled violently to the left, the wing hit by shrapnel, and the correspondent for a second felt all the guts gone from her and he held his seat straps tightly, waiting for the crash. Then the nose came up and the pilot shoved a throttle on the instrument panel.

"Bombs!" he shouted.

The aircraft lurched upward as the navigator released seven tons of high explosives. "Bombs gone, sir," he said. The Stirling's eight machine guns began to clatter as the pilot did a steep turn to the right, obviously following the broad, pedestrian-jammed avenue which was plainly visible below them. He gestured with his thumb.

"Unter den Linden," he yelled. The correspondent was sick again, this time on the floor, thinking, the paper'll fire me, no one would believe it, five Polish aircraft attacking the heart of Germany.

"I tell you," the correspondent was saying to the Control Officer, "they went to Berlin! Berlin, by God, not Munich!"

"Yes, old chap, I know. I've seen the photographs they brought back. Jolly good bombing results, too."

"But, Christ, man, why did they do it, five aircraft?"

"Well, it's a little hard to explain. They're Poles, remember, and they saw Warsaw bombed to death and their families lined up and shot. Berlin is a symbol, I think. The capital of the Third Reich. I believe it has some sort of emotional satisfaction for them. You see, they carry a kind of hate that's difficult for us to understand."

"Christ, do they do this all the time?"

"Oh, no, very seldom. We usually send them to targets in the Ruhr, where they do splendid jobs. Then, of course, they don't have enough petrol to get to Berlin."

"It's incredible," said the American. "Incredible. And," he went on accusingly, "you told me the RAF bombs at 17,000 feet. Why, do you realize, they were down to 1000 feet?"

"No, but I can quite believe it." The Control Officer slapped the corre-

spondent on the back. "Never mind, old boy, our own chaps are on tonight, pukka English crews, and you can get a story with them."

"And then all the way home they chattered in Polish. I couldn't understand a word they said. If I'd known what they were saying," said the American plaintively, "I might have been able to write a story. You know, if I knew what their reactions were, what they were thinking. But they just chattered away, the pilot grinning like a fool, and every so often one of the others would come up and slap him on the back and they'd both chatter and grin some more."

"Yes," said the Control Officer. "The language makes it especially difficult. We can't make them understand we intend to bomb Berlin, plenty, but not yet. And then, too, that's what they always tell the Intelligence Officer, when he's bawling them out for shows like this. They just spread their hands and say, 'No understand English, sorry, bloody sorry.' " He lit a cigarette. "Yes," he said thoughtfully, "they definitely speak another language."

# ST. BARNABAS AND ST. JUDE

by

Constance Pultz

It no longer mattered to him that the girls had grown old waiting for him to die. He gave no more thought to their peaked faces and thinning hair than to a cracked plate or a bed gone springless in his service. Age had so withered his capacity for affection that little remained beyond a confused gratitude for the purveying of arrowroot puddings and jelly cups.

On his good days he waited for the girls in a room burdened with plush sofas and gilt-framed engravings of Waterloo and Austerlitz and Bunker Hill. On bad days he lay in bed with the sheet drawn over his lean shanks and there listened for the noise of their key in the lock. It was a dubious matter for a man of his years to be living thus, untended and alone, but he would not keep a servant or allow the girls to come to him permanently—for which latter prejudice Ada, in particular, was grateful. She and Isabel would scheme periodically to have him moved to some nursing home, and each time their schemes were spoiled by a logic that could still manage, on occasion, to rise to heights of coherence. He must stay where he was because it had been his home for so long, because Editha, his wife, had lived here with him before passing on to roomier and more celestial quarters. Something had given him the notion that he, too, must stop here until he died; and in the face of this the girls, sentimental at heart, or merely economical, gave up their projects and confined themselves to conferences with his doctor and with William, the handy man, whose job it was to see the old man settled in his bed at night.

"Living here," Ada calculated, "is cheaper than a nursing home, where

they charge for every clean sheet and every extra cup of broth. It's best to conserve wherever there is a chance to conserve. For who knows how far the money will go?"

All these years, she was thinking, will have stood for nothing if, when he dies, there is left only enough to bury him. And, it was to be supposed, this same thought occurred to Isabel on mornings when she looked more faded than usual and could not drink her coffee.

"It's the weather," she complained, cradling one arm with the other in search of some evasive warmth. "Rain and rain and more rain."

"And in the summer," said Ada grimly, making tea instead of the coffee that Isabel could not drink, "it's heat. Now if he would only be good enough to die before the heat sets in."

Isabel, driven to bitterness by neuritis and loathing for a room that smelled incessantly of eating and sleeping, inquired if he had not lost the talent for dying. "He has forgotten the formula, just as he has forgotten everything else except Editha—and the fact that on Sundays we bring him ice cream."

"Which he prefers to pudding," observed Ada, "because it costs more. Something tells him that we pay thirty cents for the ice cream, whereas pudding can be made with diluted milk for a dime."

"There'll be disappointments in store for him one Sunday or another," said Isabel, accepting her tea. "When we have had to buy stockings or the price of lamb shanks has gone up. Then you'll see the tears."

"The senile!" exclaimed Ada, throwing up her hands. "My God, how I hate the senile!"

"As if we were so far from being that ourselves," said Isabel, smiling tenuously. She drank her tea, then turned the cup upside down and revolved it once on its saucer before righting it again. Carefully, she studied the residue of leaves. "There's nothing," she remarked finally, "as usual. Let me have your cup, Ada. You're always the lucky one."

Ada laughed dryly and showed her cup.

"Why," cried Isabel, examining it, "you're to come into a windfall. Here's a sack spilling coins."

Ada mimicked her. "A windfall! And whatever should I do with a windfall, Isabel? For you it would mean a fur coat, I suppose."

"To my heels. I'd have one to my heels that would keep me warm in winter for a change," vowed Isabel. "I'd have my fill of flowers, too. A boutonniere six days a week, and a full-sized corsage on Sunday. Sweet peas in the spring, yellow chrysanthemums in November."

Ada held that yellow was a bit loud for a woman of Isabel's age, and Isabel replied that she liked yellow and that it hadn't been worn much when she was a girl. "So, given the chance, I'd have yellow scarves and blouses and even yellow hats. Never another round black hat, Ada, with a stiff silk bow in front. My dresses would be cut to fit, all velvet and ruching, and I'd wear turquoise and silver earrings and armloads of silver bracelets."

"You're a vain creature," said Ada absently. She was thinking, yes, with your bracelets and flowers and furs and cabs and presents for everyone you laid eyes on, six months would see you through the best of legacies. Then what? Then back on me again, still wearing velvets and ruchings, but grateful enough for a dingy roof over your head and a bed to share.

Wistfully, Isabel said, "You'd be more circumspect, of course, Ada?"

"Yes," said Ada. "Money has a bad habit of draining away, and I'd want to be sure of what I had. I'd let the frills go and settle for something solid, something that I could think of as lasting as long as I did."

"I suppose you'd have a house by the sea where you could live by yourself for the rest of your life."

"Yes," said Ada, "I should like that."

"In time you'd grow to hate the loneliness."

"I doubt it. People have never been so good to me that I'd miss their society very much." She looked at Isabel calmly. "Our fathers were twin brothers, and for more than a generation we have lived together. Yet our viewpoints could not be more dissimilar."

She felt a slight contempt for Isabel as she stacked cups and plates and carried them to the sink.

That afternoon there was lime jelly for the old man. He sat on the biggest of the plush sofas and ate it slowly. Now and then a blob fell on his shirt cuff, and he paused to suck it up as naturally as though the shirt cuff were another spoon. He was content to eat while the girls tidied the rooms. There were tables to dust, parquet to mop, rugs to brush, and sheets to change. There was sloppier work to be done, too, inspiring Ada, as always, with an intense relief that she did not live under the same roof with him.

"Then we'd be charwomen for certain," she whispered to Isabel. "He'd milk us for what he could. You may rest on that."

Isabel confined herself to a movement of the head that meant either yes or no, and went on with her work.

She's afraid to speak her mind in this house, thought Ada. She's too timid for that, or too superstitious. "Perhaps his ears are sharper than we know, and his brain, too." Yes, he's not past juggling his will, I suppose. That Dietz fellow drew up one document and I daresay he'd be pleased —for a fee—to do another.

She wrung out a dishrag and hung it to dry, wiped her hands on the roller towel, and went into the parlor, where Isabel had sat down beside the old man and was telling him about the weather.

"It's chilly out, very bleak and chilly. Lucky you to sit here all day in a warm room! You've a good appetite, too, haven't you?" To Ada she said, "He's gone through all the jelly, and there's not a crumb to be found of the crackers we left last time in the cupboard."

"He eats too much," said Ada curtly, trying to fix her hair with the aid of a hairpin and the gilt mirror that hung between Austerlitz and Waterloo. "He should cut down on his food. Although, really, what does it matter?"

She continued to arrange her hair, hooking loose ends back with the hairpin and thrusting them under her net. She pulled down the sleeves of her dress and fastened them at the wrist, shook out her skirt where kneeling had crumpled it, stooped to rub dust from the toe of one oxford. A curtain hung askew at the window, and, going over to right it, she found that rain had begun to fall in the street.

"With dusk coming on," she remarked to Isabel, "it will probably freeze. We'd best be going, I think."

She walked about in search of her gloves, then helped with Isabel's scarf and stood impatiently by while she fussed with the angle of her hat. "Now that it's wet," and the thought annoyed her, "we shall have to take the streetcar."

She felt in her purse for the required dime, and glanced contemplatively at the old man, who was surveying the palms of his hands and the roughened skin of one knuckle. "You're old," said Ada's glance. "Impossibly old, hideously old. Indecently old, too, for the decent don't live to gouge chunks out of one generation after another, as you've been doing. How much longer will it go on, I wonder? Surely you haven't much time left. Nor have we, the trouble is, nor have we. You must be quick about it now. For our sakes you mustn't dawdle."

She took a handkerchief from her pocket and dabbed at her nose. Successively, she and Isabel kissed the old man's cheek before going out into the rain.

The girls slept fitfully that night. Isabel was bothered with a conviction that lime jelly had been served up to the old man in her black hat and that he had been caught using her cameo brooch as a spoon. Ada was irked by a franker form of indigestion. When, sometime after midnight, they were roused by a knock on the door, she started up as though this were a signal for which she had been waiting.

"It may be William," cried Isabel, her teeth chattering with nervousness. "The old man may have had one of his spells. It may be that William has put through a call to us."

Tensely, she waited under her blankets while Ada went out into the hall. Propped on her elbow, she could see her reflection in the square of mirror that hung on the wall. How gray I look, she thought. My skin needs treatments. It hasn't been properly looked after in years, and my hair has lost its curl. What wonders I could do with a little money!

In the end, every thought came back to that, to money, to the lack of it, the need of it. Once, for a brief time, it had been otherwise. With Harry alive, fulfillment had been the natural conclusion to every wish. Chocolates, suède gloves, theater tickets, wine for dinner, soft-wheeled cabs rolling up through the snowy twilight—these amiable trifles were the essence of life with Harry. He had been a charming Santa Claus, but his money had not lasted long, and he had not lasted long beyond his money. Having been wife to Harry was next thing to having been a spinster all one's life. At twenty-nine, Isabel had gone back to music teaching and to living with Ada, who had begun so many fine things in her youth, and finished so few, and was now sourly resigned to maintaining herself on what had been intended as guarantee against the potter's field.

Drawing the blankets more closely around her shoulders, Isabel waited for Ada's return. It came in the form of a clicking latch, the sluff of slippers on the chilly floor.

"It was William," said Ada, going to the closet and taking down the dress she had worn a few hours earlier. "He found the old man doubled up when he went to put him to bed. The doctor is there, and he has ordered a nurse, but I shall go over, anyway."

"And I," said Isabel resolutely, casting about for her stockings.

Ada said stiffly, "Won't it be absurd for you to go out on a night like this with your delicate throat?"

Isabel replied, "My throat is not delicate, as you very well know."

"We have no assurance that it is the end," said Ada coldly, "and it's quite enough for one of us to go."

Isabel continued stubbornly to dress. "I shall go. You may stay here if you like."

"I know what haunts you." Ada paused in the act of drawing on a shoe. "It's the fear that he will, somehow, manage to cut you off at the end if you're not there to watch. You are thinking of the teacup reading when you drew a blank and I was the one with the lucky omen."

For a moment they sat, stockings dangling, half believing, and staring at one another in suddenly declared hostility.

By the time they reached Park Street the doctor had gone. The door was opened to them by a nurse who spoke piously, like one paid to ease the soul in travail. "Death will be a matter of time," she declared. "Today, tomorrow, next week. We can only prepare ourselves——" and she made a slight inclination of the head toward hands that she kept folded on the waistband of her skirt.

Taking off their street things, the girls went down the hall to the bedroom, crossing a carpet that had been laid when Editha was still alive. Those were her china urns, hers the lamp with the crystal base, the tufted chairs, the simpering, old-fashioned heads of children hung like beneficent angels over the bed. More out of place now than he had ever been in this atmosphere, the old man lay as a lank and ugly impediment to Editha's counterpane. His gnarled fist and sinewed arm were drawn up to, and flung across, a head as gnarled and sinewed, and, as though he had been watching and waiting, his eyelids parted as the girls came in.

"It's Ada," said Ada softly. "Ada and Isabel. Do you see? We've come to be with you. There's no need to worry now. You're comfortable? You're comfortable, are you?"

She adjusted his pillow while Isabel seated herself on the other side of the bed and smiled down at him tensely and stroked his hand.

Later, the girls went outside and announced to the nurse that they would stay the night. They stripped to their petticoats and lay down with a blanket apiece. Toward dawn they slept, and were roused finally by the steps of the nurse as she came and went between bedroom and kitchen.

"He seems brighter this morning," she said, and when, having dressed and drunk coffee, they went in to him, they found this to be so. He was not only pleased to see them, but possessed of an astonishing lucidity. He welcomed them with a smile and a movement of the hand, and be-

gan to talk of all the things that were reminders of Editha and the past. He drew their attention to the purple leather prayerbook that had been Editha's, and the shell-and-bead picture frame, and the footstool that she had worked the winter bronchitis kept her indoors. He instructed them to wind the music box and goad it into playing *Annie Laurie* and *Will Ye No Come Back Again?* Almost too late, he was discovering a love for the inanimate, and was determined to infuse the girls with this same love.

"Isabel would like the portrait of Editha and myself, painted the second week of our honeymoon," he said. "We had been to St. Martin's, I remember, and Editha was looking particularly handsome. You'll see it there, the look that was Editha. Even now you'll see it in the portrait.

"And, Ada," he said, pausing to cough and draw a wavering breath, "I haven't forgotten you, Ada. You're to have the set of Dickens and the figurines that were brought over from Dresden in the last year of the old century. That was a year! You don't remember it, Ada—but of course you do. Yes, that was in your time, wasn't it?

"Isabel, you shall have the music box. You were always so fond of music. Editha used to say that you had a sweet voice for a ballad."

Ada, listening patiently, turning the handle of the music box, tried not to let her eyes wander, but thought with a passion it was hard to control, What nonsense, oh, what nonsense! Here we are, and he speaks of figurines and portraits with streaked varnish and chipped frames! What if Editha was handsome? What of that now?

And aloud she said, "Yes. Yes." And went on turning the handle of the music box and listening to the pinched strains of a song that had something to do with a prince named Charlie.

He did not die that day, nor the next, but on a Sunday, finally, reluctantly, taking his time even at the end about a thing he had been so long making up his mind to do. The girls bought veils for their round hats, and new black gloves, and a black-edged handkerchief apiece. They did credit to the old man's memory as they rode to the cemetery in a closed car. Mr. Dietz said as much when, the next afternoon, he came to call, with his brief case and rimless glasses and legalistic countenance.

"He thought a great deal of you, a very great deal of you. But then I'm sure that's a thing you know quite well for yourselves. He used to talk about you often in years gone by."

Mr. Dietz made a dry sound in his throat and began to discuss the will. "It's in the form of a trust fund. You probably suspected as much, knowing him as you did. And of course it's often done in this way. 'The days of lump bequests are over,' I tell my clients. We are entering on a socialistic era—if you will pardon the term—and a trust fund is quite the soundest way of ensuring justice to all parties."

Ada repeated the dryness in her own throat. "Of course," she said, and did not look at Isabel.

Mr. Dietz smiled on them both indulgently. "I didn't think that you ladies would want to be bothered with facts and figures, and so, although they're right here in black and white, I've taken the liberty of breaking them down a trifle. In so many words, I'm in a position to tell you in round dollars exactly how much it will amount to. Per week."

How well he understands us, thought Ada. Shaking out her black-edged handkerchief, she inquired coolly, "And how much, in round dollars, will that be?"

Mr. Dietz rustled through his papers. "About," he said, and made very sure of this, "seven-fifty per week."

"Apiece?" Ada drew her mouth into a smile. "How very good he has been to us!"

Mr. Dietz remarked with pleasant deprecation, "You were his only living relatives. But it is a nice bit of pin money, isn't it? Enough to take care of a new frock now and then, or a trip to the theater."

Ada asked, "What will become of the estate when we are gone?"

"It passes then, in entirety, to St. Martin's Church."

"He was always a religious man," said Ada, masking accusation with another smile.

In due time Mr. Dietz took his leave. Isabel walked to the window and complained of neuritis and the fact that rain was falling. With a shawl draped over her shoulders, and one arm cradling the other, she stood with her back to Ada.

"It was good of him to bring the music box," she said presently.

"And the figurines," said Ada. "But of course he has a car, so it was really no trouble."

"Is the Dickens to come tomorrow?"

"In the morning," said Ada.

"I haven't read Dickens since I was a girl. I remember one winter when I was ill and Dickens seemed to fit in very well."

"Then we needn't be bored," said Ada, "for months to come."

There was a silence while Isabel moved away from the window. "I should like a little music," she said. "Will you wind the music box?"

"If you like." And mackerel in season, Ada was thinking as she lifted the music box onto the table. Once a week to the movies. A new black hat with a silk bow and a good dark dress every second winter instead of every third——

With a blow of her arm she swept the instrument onto the floor, where it began to play, wildly, over and over again, the same fierce tangle of notes; then collapsed in a whirl of springs and screws.

Isabel stood without moving. Slowly Ada knelt down and began to gather up the bits. "I'm getting old," she whimpered. "You can see that for yourself. I'm beginning to have fits of childishness."

Isabel soothed her. "It's only that you are tired. You'll be all right in the morning."

Inexplicably and ridiculously, she found herself thinking of a church called St. Martin's, and of one vestryman saying to another, "Well, it can't be so long now, and that's a fact. In this weather those two old women won't last the year out. No, surely they won't, not when we're so in need of windows for St. Barnabas and St. Jude, to say nothing of a carillon for the baptistry——"

Isabel began to laugh. She laughed until her cheeks were wet and her sides aching. Afterwards she wept, and in this Ada joined her. They sat side by side in the debris of an old music box, mourning the loss of a thing they had never had.

# THREE POEMS

by

Francis C. Cook

## *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: GREETING*

Appoint at once a commission,
build a huge block on the edge
of every city: New York, Canton,
London, Rio, Istanbul.
On each block engrave warning:

You who succeed us, who take over our continents,
wherever you come from: We have nothing against you,
but wish you more luck with the earth
than we had, who muffed it.
Be warned, however, by this stone:

Do not become nations,
do not become classes,
be equal and do not divide.
Do not build cities,
do not multiply greatly.
Keep the streams clean
and the earth young.
Do not be gluttons of things,
be spare, be lean, be free.

And last, best not even inquire
who built these scarred stones.

Thus only may you fare well.
Farewell.

## *THE CHOICE*

I have no friends on the board of directors,
I have never commanded the respect of bankers,
My friend was never president of anything,
And no one has wired me a good offer.

Hence I have come to the cabin on Yonah,
Recalling the confident consolation
Of eloquent, easy advisers:
The bounty and kindness of nature.

But here it has rained since week before last,
Here the ovenbird keeps fastidious distance,
I see only the tail of the field mouse
And the squirrel denounces me roundly.

Yet though thus little encouraged and welcomed,
I shall still remain on this mountain shoulder.
I would rather be scorned by squirrels
Than presume on the time of officials.

## *THE PHILOSOPHER*

Through all your thwarted and baffled years
As persons, your centuries as peoples,
You will not have me yet: you call me unfit
For a world where steel is molded
And armies march by millions
(Yet where woe too is woven
And none of you lives at ease).

But I do not deny you:
Indeed where you will not have me

I have you tight in my trap:
I, Socrates, have you,
I, Epicurus, have you,
I, Lucretius, have you.

For if you but lift up your glass I have you,
Or if you refuse it I have you,
And if it is sweet I have you,
Or bitter I have you still better.
Yes, long as you live I have you,
Despite your denial—and dead?

—As the long wind takes up the grief
Of the untwigged autumn leaf.

# THE GOATS OF JUAN FERNANDEZ:

## A Note on Survival

by

Coleman Rosenberger

The fern grows in the volcanic dust, the green
Frond, surviving a thousand spores, turning
From the water to this island in the water,
The fossil's heir, extending its stipe and blade;

The sea elephants swim, sporting and mating,
Keeping the cunning contours for survival;
And the fur seals, gregarious in the rookeries,
Gathering the harems, mating and surviving;

Concealed by its color and the foliage is
The green bird guarding the fertilized egg,
Its mate, above, poised over the pinnacles,
Is supported by what generations of wings?

Here Juan Fernandez, the Devil's sailor,
Sea sorcerer, rider of trade winds,
Piloted goats to anchorage on the islands.
The goats survived.

# TWO POEMS

by

M. H. Constable

## *BETWEEN THE ANTIPODES AND THE CYCLADES*

Between the Antipodes and the Cyclades
are marigolds and stars caught in the trees;
I never saw, and never could be told,
as much as these comprise of destinies.

There are two poles and twenty thousand more
of passion and its varying degrees;
there shall be less, I doubt, since ages pour
these times down conduits of centuries—

But, out of touch with fashion, whose disease
is flood in these our times, I will explore
you, two and twenty thousand idiosyncrasies
of love, between the Antipodes and the Cyclades.

## *BALOO*

baloo, my lazy brethren, bor baloo
hump hutching on your stilted legs to town—
tip-tap, tit-tilted stenographic she—
the suppery fruit filed, fingered, flipped around
forage, fat flatwife, fuller butter bins

marchant! you shout: jews riot, troops repel,
shawl-chauffed, hanged lapdog, numbrinyloned magatron
squelch squat hoof, knick knack tip-toe stilt
upon our pavements—would they hellmulch were!
felicity unconscious! hump, drape, stilt, purblind!

# THREE POEMS

by

Thomas McGrath

## *COME INTO THE GARDEN*

When I was ten the world looked in through my eyes
Without amazement and without amusement
Noting the magic tree, the little blind dog,
The serious view of life, desire to be like my father—
The flora and fauna of the world of ten
Frightening to no one.

When I was seventeen the world looked in
On a technicolor nightmare of sex and depression.
Whores sang in the tree, tramps in the midnight alley,
And the farmers on the hills in the WPA wagons.
The little dog laughed. But the world to the observers
Seemed less and less happy.

Now I am older and the world looks in
On the ruined landscape of those earlier years.
Here silent figures clothed with menace move
Between the background war and the next depression.
Frightened the world looks in on the world it made:
And must be changed to change it.

## *A WOMAN PRAYING THROUGH THE "ST LOUIS BLUES"*

Surrounded by the casual music of circumstance
She kneels on the sore bones of poverty and ignorance.
Her goodness is common as her pulled-back hair.
Her kindness makes her certain God will hear.
She thinks of Him as a vase or letter in the far attic,
Forgetting that shelf was long ago cleaned out.
She dreams she locates Him on her personal radar.

*It ain't for diamonds or for curly hair*
*The woman I love she wouldn't go nowhere*
Nor for luck nor pride nor fear nor happiness
(Happiness was killed in a crack-up in the war)
But for the general welfare of this world and the next.
The radio makes its generalized statement of loss
Which she can believe having buried her son.
She wants so hard, I would be willing to be God.
But the blues get lost in God and she goes away
Rapt in her love and a twelve-bar music no angel
Tailored in light and inhumanity can equal.

## *CRADLE SONG WITH LIGHT MACHINE GUNS*

April, 1944

Now sleeps the diplomat and through his head
Blows a glamorous music heavy with the dead.
On the tightrope of history but safe from harm
Each politician balances his personal charm.
(And the generals are sleeping in each other's arms.)

Now sleep the workers while all around
The beasts of the thirties gather without sound,
And the long corridor cannot quite cover
The sharp click of handcuffs which the headlines smother.
(Somewhere the future may be sleeping with another.)

Then sleep gentle soldiers, all and one,
And sleep each honest workingman.
Though you may waken to the sound of screams—
Sleep little brothers as if there were time.
(Our betrayal is still sleeping in a stranger's dreams.)

# IN DARKNESS AND CONFUSION

by

Ann Petry

William Jones took a sip of coffee and then put his cup down on the kitchen table. It didn't taste right and he was annoyed because he always looked forward to eating breakfast. He usually got out of bed as soon as he woke up and hurried into the kitchen. Then he would take a long time heating the corn bread left over from dinner the night before, letting the coffee brew until it was strong and clear, frying bacon and scrambling eggs. He would eat very slowly—savoring the early-morning quiet and the just-rightness of the food he'd fixed.

There was no question about early morning being the best part of the day, he thought. But this Saturday morning in July it was too hot in the apartment. There were too many nagging worries that kept drifting through his mind. In the heat he couldn't think clearly—so that all of them pressed in against him, weighed him down.

He pushed his plate away from him. The eggs had cooked too long; much as he liked corn bread it tasted like sand this morning—grainy and coarse inside his throat. He couldn't help wondering if it scratched the inside of his stomach in the same way.

Pink was moving around in the bedroom. He cocked his head on one side, listening to her. He could tell exactly what she was doing, as though he were in there with her. The soft heavy sound of her stockinged feet as she walked over to the dresser. The dresser drawer being pulled out. That meant she was getting a clean slip. Then the thud of her two hundred pounds landing in the rocker by the window. She was sitting down to comb her hair. Untwisting the small braids she'd made the night before. She would unwind them one by one, putting the hairpins

in her mouth as she went along. Now she was brushing it, for he could hear the creak of the rocker; she was rocking back and forth, humming under her breath as she brushed.

He decided that as soon as she came into the kitchen he would go back to the bedroom, get dressed, and go to work. For his mind was already on the mailbox. He didn't feel like talking to Pink. There simply had to be a letter from Sam today. There had to be.

He was thinking about it so hard that he didn't hear Pink walk toward the kitchen.

When he looked up she was standing in the doorway. She was a short, enormously fat woman. The only garment she had on was a bright pink slip that magnified the size of her body. The skin on her arms and shoulders and chest was startlingly black against the pink material. In spite of the brisk brushing she had given her hair, it stood up stiffly all over her head in short wiry lengths, as though she wore a turban of some rough dark-gray material.

He got up from the table quickly when he saw her. "Hot, ain't it?" he said, and patted her arm as he went past her toward the bedroom.

She looked at the food on his plate. "You didn't want no breakfast?" she asked.

"Too hot," he said over his shoulder.

He closed the bedroom door behind him gently. If she saw the door was shut, she'd know that he was kind of low in his mind this morning and that he didn't feel like talking. At first he moved about with energy —getting a clean work shirt, giving his shoes a hasty brushing, hunting for a pair of clean socks. Then he stood still in the middle of the room, holding his dark work pants in his hand while he listened to the rush and roar of water running in the bathtub.

Annie May was up and taking a bath. And he wondered if that meant she was going to work. Days when she went to work she used a hot comb on her hair before she ate her breakfast, so that before he left the house in the morning it was filled with the smell of hot irons sizzling against hair grease.

He frowned. Something had to be done about Annie May. Here she was only eighteen years old and staying out practically all night long. He hadn't said anything to Pink about it, but Annie May crept into the house at three and four and five in the morning. He would hear her key go in the latch and then the telltale click as the lock drew back. She would shut the door very softly and turn the bolt. She'd stand there

awhile, waiting to see if they woke up. Then she'd take her shoes off and pad down the hall in her stockinged feet.

When she turned the light on in the bathroom, he could see the clock on the dresser. This morning it was four-thirty when she came in. Pink, lying beside him, went on peacefully snoring. He was glad that she didn't wake up easy. It would only worry her to know that Annie May was carrying on like that.

Annie May put her hands on her hips and threw her head back and laughed whenever he tried to tell her she had to come home earlier. The smoky smell of the hot irons started seeping into the bedroom and he finished dressing quickly.

He stopped in the kitchen on his way out. "Got to get to the store early today," he explained. He was sure Pink knew he was hurrying downstairs to look in the mailbox. But she nodded and held her face up for his kiss. When he brushed his lips against her forehead he saw that her face was wet with perspiration. He thought with all that weight she must feel the heat something awful.

Annie May nodded at him without speaking. She was hastily swallowing a cup of coffee. Her dark thin hands made a pattern against the thick white cup she was holding. She had pulled her hair out so straight with the hot combs that, he thought, it was like a shiny skullcap fitted tight to her head. He was surprised to see that her lips were heavily coated with lipstick. When she was going to work she didn't use any, and he wondered why she was up so early if she wasn't working. He could see the red outline of her mouth on the cup.

He hadn't intended to say anything. It was the sight of the lipstick on the cup that forced the words out. "You ain't workin' today?"

"No," she said lazily. "Think I'll go shopping." She winked at Pink, and it infuriated him.

"How you expect to keep a job when you don't show up half the time?" he asked.

"I can always get another one." She lifted the coffee cup to her mouth with both hands and her eyes laughed at him over the rim of the cup.

"What time did you come home last night?" he asked abruptly.

She stared out of the window at the blank brick wall that faced the kitchen. "I dunno," she said finally. "It wasn't late."

He didn't know what to say. Probably she was out dancing somewhere. Or maybe she wasn't. He was fairly certain that she wasn't. Yet he couldn't let Pink know what he was thinking. He shifted his feet un-

easily and watched Annie May swallow the coffee. She was drinking it fast.

"You know you ain't too big to get your butt whipped," he said finally.

She looked at him out of the corner of her eyes. And he saw a deep smoldering sullenness in her face that startled him. He was conscious that Pink was watching both of them with a growing apprehension.

Then Annie May giggled. "You and who else?" she said lightly. Pink roared with laughter. And Annie May laughed with her.

He banged the kitchen door hard as he went out. Striding down the outside hall, he could still hear them laughing. And even though he knew Pink's laughter was due to relief because nothing unpleasant had happened, he was angry. Lately every time Annie May looked at him there was open, jeering laughter in her eyes, as though she dared him to say anything to her. Almost as though she thought he was a fool for working so hard.

She had been a nice little girl when she first came to live with them six years ago. He groped in his mind for words to describe what he thought Annie May had become. A Jezebel, he decided grimly. That was it.

And he didn't want Pink to know what Annie May was really like. Because Annie May's mother, Lottie, had been Pink's sister. And when Lottie died, Pink took Annie May. Right away she started finding excuses for anything she did that was wrong. If he scolded Annie May he had to listen to a sharp lecture from Pink. It always started off the same way: "Don't care what she done, William. You ain't goin' to lay a finger on her. She ain't got no father and mother except us. . . ."

The quick spurt of anger and irritation at Annie May had sent him hurrying down the first flight of stairs. But he slowed his pace on the next flight because the hallways were so dark that he knew if he wasn't careful he'd walk over a step. As he trudged down the long flights of stairs he began to think about Pink. And the hot irritation in him disappeared as it usually did when he thought about her. She was so fat she couldn't keep on climbing all these steep stairs. They would have to find another place to live—on a first floor where it would be easier for her. They'd lived on this top floor for years, and all the time Pink kept getting heavier and heavier. Every time she went to the clinic the doctor said the stairs were bad for her. So they'd start looking for another apartment and then because the top floors cost less, why, they stayed where they were. And——

Then he stopped thinking about Pink because he had reached the first floor. He walked over to the mailboxes and took a deep breath. Today there'd be a letter. He knew it. There had to be. It had been too long a time since they had had a letter from Sam. The last ones that came he'd said the same thing. Over and over. Like a refrain. "Ma, I can't stand this much longer." And then the letters just stopped.

As he stood there, looking at the mailbox, half afraid to open it for fear there would be no letter, he thought back to the night Sam graduated from high school. It was a warm June night. He and Pink got all dressed up in their best clothes. And he kept thinking me and Pink have got as far as we can go. But Sam—he made up his mind Sam wasn't going to earn his living with a mop and a broom. He was going to earn it wearing a starched white collar, and a shine on his shoes and a crease in his pants.

After he finished high school Sam got a job redcapping at Grand Central. He started saving his money because he was going to go to Lincoln—a college in Pennsylvania. It looked like it was no time at all before he was twenty-one. And in the army. Pink cried when he left. Her huge body shook with her sobbing. He remembered that he had only felt queer and lost. There was this war and all the young men were being drafted. But why Sam—why did he have to go?

It was always in the back of his mind. Next thing Sam was in a camp in Georgia. He and Pink never talked about his being in Georgia. The closest they ever came to it was one night when she said, "I hope he gets used to it quick down there. Bein' born right here in New York there's lots he won't understand."

Then Sam's letters stopped coming. He'd come home from work and say to Pink casually, "Sam write today?" She'd shake her head without saying anything.

The days crawled past. And finally she burst out. "What you keep askin' for? You think I wouldn't tell you?" And she started crying.

He put his arm around her and patted her shoulder. She leaned hard against him. "Oh, Lord," she said. "He's my baby. What they done to him?"

Her crying like that tore him in little pieces. His mind kept going around in circles. Around and around. He couldn't think what to do. Finally one night after work he sat down at the kitchen table and wrote Sam a letter. He had written very few letters in his life because Pink had always done it for him. And now standing in front of the mailbox

he could even remember the feel of the pencil in his hand; how the paper looked—blank and challenging—lying there in front of him; that the kitchen clock was ticking and it kept getting louder and louder. It was hot that night, too, and he held the pencil so tight that the inside of his hand was covered with sweat.

He had sat and thought a long time. Then he wrote: "Is you all right? Your Pa." It was the best he could do. He licked the envelope and addressed it with the feeling that Sam would understand.

He fumbled for his key ring, found the mailbox key, and opened the box quickly. It was empty. Even though he could see it was empty he felt around inside it. Then he closed the box and walked toward the street door.

The brilliant sunlight outside made him blink after the darkness of the hall. Even now, so early in the morning, it was hot in the street. And he thought it was going to be a hard day to get through, what with the heat and its being Saturday and all. Lately he couldn't seem to think about anything but Sam. Even at the drugstore where he worked as a porter, he would catch himself leaning on the broom or pausing in his mopping to wonder what had happened to him.

The man who owned the store would say to him sharply, "Boy, what the hell's the matter with you? Can't you keep your mind on what you're doing?" And he would go on washing windows, or mopping the floor, or sweeping the sidewalk. But his thoughts, somehow, no matter what he was doing, drifted back to Sam.

As he walked toward the drugstore he looked at the houses on both sides of the street. He knew this street as he knew the creases in the old felt hat he wore the year round. No matter how you looked at it, it wasn't a good street to live on. It was a long cross-town street. Almost half of it on one side consisted of the backs of the three theaters on One Hundred Twenty-fifth Street—a long blank wall of gray brick. There were few trees on the street. Even these were a source of danger, for at night shadowy, vague shapes emerged from the street's darkness, lurking near the trees, dodging behind them. He had never been accosted by any of those disembodied figures, but the very stealth of their movements revealed a dishonest intent that frightened him. So when he came home at night he walked an extra block or more in order to go through One Hundred Twenty-fifth Street and enter the street from Eighth Avenue.

Early in the morning like this, the street slept. Window shades were drawn down tight against the morning sun. The few people he passed

were walking briskly on their way to work. But in those houses where the people still slept, the window shades would go up about noon, and radios would blast music all up and down the street. The bold-eyed women who lived in these houses would lounge in the open windows and call to each other back and forth across the street.

Sometimes when he was on his way home to lunch they would call out to him as he went past, "Come on in, Poppa!" And he would stare straight ahead and start walking faster.

When Sam turned sixteen it seemed to him the street was unbearable. After lunch he and Sam went through this block together—Sam to school and he on his way back to the drugstore. He'd seen Sam stare at the lounging women in the windows. His face was expressionless, but his eyes were curious.

"I catch you goin' near one of them women and I'll beat you up and down the block," he'd said grimly.

Sam didn't answer him. Instead he looked down at him with a strangely adult look, for even at sixteen Sam had been a good five inches taller than he. After that when they passed through the block, Sam looked straight ahead. And William got the uncomfortable feeling that he had already explored the possibilities that the block offered. Yet he couldn't be sure. And he couldn't bring himself to ask him. Instead he walked along beside him, thinking desperately, We gotta move. I'll talk to Pink. We gotta move this time for sure.

That Sunday after Pink came home from church they looked for a new place. They went in and out of apartment houses along Seventh Avenue and Eighth Avenue, One Hundred Thirty-fifth Street, One Hundred Forty-fifth Street. Most of the apartments they didn't even look at. They just asked the super how much the rents were.

It was late when they headed for home. He had irritably agreed with Pink that they'd better stay where they were. Twenty-two dollars a month was all they could afford.

"It ain't a fit place to live, though," he said. They were walking down Seventh Avenue. The street looked wide to him, and he thought with distaste of their apartment. The rooms weren't big enough for a man to move around in without bumping into something. Sometimes he thought that was why Annie May spent so much time away from home. Even at thirteen she couldn't stand being cooped up like that in such a small amount of space.

And Pink said, "You want to live on Park Avenue? With a doorman

bowin' you in and out. 'Good mornin', Mr. William Jones. Does the weather suit you this mornin'?' " Her voice was sharp, like the crack of a whip.

That was five years ago. And now again they ought to move on account of Pink not being able to stand the stairs any more. He decided that Monday night after work he'd start looking for a place.

It was even hotter in the drugstore than it was in the street. He forced himself to go inside and put on a limp work coat. Then broom in hand he went to stand in the doorway. He waved to the superintendent of the building on the corner. And watched him as he lugged garbage cans out of the areaway and rolled them to the curb. Now, that's the kind of work he didn't want Sam to have to do. He tried to decide why that was. It wasn't just because Sam was his boy and it was hard work. He searched his mind for the reason. It didn't pay enough for a man to live on decently. That was it. He wanted Sam to have a job where he could make enough to have good clothes and a nice home.

Sam's being in the army wasn't so bad, he thought. It was his being in Georgia that was bad. They didn't treat colored people right down there. Everybody knew that. If he could figure out some way to get him farther north Pink wouldn't have to worry about him so much.

The very sound of the word "Georgia" did something to him inside. His mother had been born there. She had talked about it a lot and painted such vivid pictures of it that he felt he knew the place—the heat, the smell of the earth, how cotton looked. And something more. The way her mouth had folded together whenever she had said, "They hate niggers down there. Don't you never none of you children go down there."

That was years ago, yet even now, standing here on Fifth Avenue, remembering the way she said it turned his skin clammy cold in spite of the heat. And of all the places in the world, Sam had to go to Georgia. Sam, who was born right here in New York, who had finished high school here—they had to put him in the army and send him to Georgia.

He tightened his grip on the broom and started sweeping the sidewalk in long, even strokes. Gradually the rhythm of the motion stilled the agitation in him. The regular back-and-forth motion was so pleasant that he kept on sweeping long after the sidewalk was clean. When Mr. Yudkin, who owned the store, arrived at eight-thirty he was still outside with the broom. Even now he didn't feel much like talking, so he only nodded in response to the druggist's brisk, "Good morning! Hot today!"

William followed him into the store and began polishing the big mirror in back of the soda fountain. He watched the man out of the corner of his eye as he washed his hands in the back room and exchanged his suit coat for a crisp white laboratory coat. And he thought maybe when the war is over Sam ought to study to be a druggist instead of a doctor or a lawyer.

As the morning wore along, customers came in in a steady stream. They got Bromo-Seltzers, cigarettes, aspirin, cough medicine, baby bottles. He delivered two prescriptions that cost five dollars. And the cash register rang so often it almost played a tune. Listening to it he said to himself, yes, Sam ought to be a druggist. It's clean work and it pays good.

A little after eleven o'clock three young girls came in. "Cokes," they said, and climbed up on the stools in front of the fountain. William was placing new stock on the shelves and he studied them from the top of the stepladder. As far as he could see, they looked exactly alike. All three of them. And like Annie May. Too thin. Too much lipstick. Their dresses were too short and too tight. Their hair was piled on top of their heads in slicked set curls.

"Aw, I quit that job," one of them said. "I wouldn't get up that early in the morning for nothing in the world."

That was like Annie May, too. She was always changing jobs. Because she could never get to work on time. If she was due at a place at nine she got there at ten. If at ten, then she arrived about eleven. He knew, too, that she didn't earn enough money to pay for all the cheap, bright-colored dresses she was forever buying.

Her girl friends looked just like her and just like these girls. He'd seen her coming out of the movie houses on One Hundred Twenty-fifth Street with two or three of them. They were all chewing gum and they nudged each other and talked too loud and laughed too loud. They stared hard at every man who went past them.

Mr. Yudkin looked up at him sharply, and he shifted his glance away from the girls and began putting big bottles of Father John's medicine neatly on the shelf in front of him. As he stacked the bottles up he wondered if Annie May would have been different if she'd stayed in high school. She had stopped going when she was sixteen. He had spoken to Pink about it. "She oughtn't to stop school. She's too young," he'd said.

And because Annie May was Pink's sister's child all Pink had done

had been to shake her head comfortably. "She's tired of going to school. Poor little thing. Leave her alone."

So he hadn't said anything more. Pink always took up for her. And he and Pink didn't fuss at each other like some folks do. He didn't say anything to Pink about it, but he took the afternoon off from work to go to see the principal of the school. He had to wait two hours to see her. And he studied the pictures on the walls in the outer office, and looked down at his shoes while he tried to put into words what he'd say—and how he wanted to say it.

The principal was a large-bosomed white woman. She listened to him long enough to learn that he was Annie Mav's uncle. "Ah, yes, Mr. Jones," she said. "Now in my opinion——"

And he was buried under a flow of words, a mountain of words, that went on and on. Her voice was high-pitched and loud, and she kept talking until he lost all sense of what she was saying. There was one phrase she kept using that sort of jumped at him out of the mass of words—"a slow learner."

He left her office feeling confused and embarrassed. If he could only have found the words he could have explained that Annie May was bright as a dollar. She wasn't any "slow learner." Before he knew it he was out in the street, conscious only that he'd lost a whole afternoon's pay and he never had got to say what he'd come for. And he was boiling mad with himself. All he'd wanted was to ask the principal to help him persuade Annie May to finish school. But he'd never got the words together.

When he hung up his soiled work coat in the broom closet at eight o'clock that night he felt as though he'd been sweeping floors, dusting fixtures, cleaning fountains, and running errands since the beginning of time itself. He looked at himself in the cracked mirror that hung on the door of the closet. There was no question about it; he'd grown older-looking since Sam went in the army. His hair was turning a frizzled gray at the temples. His jawbones showed up sharper. There was a stoop in his shoulders.

"Guess I'll get a haircut," he said softly. He didn't really need one. But on a Saturday night the barbershop would be crowded. He'd have to wait a long time before Al got around to him. It would be good to listen to the talk that went on—the arguments that would get started and never really end. For a little while all the nagging worry about Sam would be pushed so far back in his mind, he wouldn't be aware of it.

The instant he entered the barbershop he could feel himself begin to relax inside. All the chairs were full. There were a lot of customers waiting. He waved a greeting to the barbers. "Hot, ain't it?" he said and mopped his forehead.

He stood there a minute, listening to the hum of conversation, before he picked out a place to sit. Some of the talk, he knew, would be violent, and he always avoided those discussions because he didn't like violence—even when it was only talk. Scraps of talk drifted past him.

"White folks got us by the balls——"

"Well, I dunno. It ain't just white folks. There's poor white folks gettin' their guts squeezed out, too——"

"Sure. But they're white. They can stand it better."

"Sadie had two dollars on 546 yesterday and it came out and——"

"You're wrong, man. Ain't no two ways about it. This country's set up so that——"

"Only thing to do, if you ask me, is shoot all them crackers and start out new——"

He finally settled himself in one of the chairs in the corner—not too far from the window and right in the middle of a group of regular customers who were arguing hotly about the war. It was a good seat. By looking in the long mirror in front of the barbers he could see the length of the shop.

Almost immediately he joined in the conversation. "Them Japs ain't got a chance——" he started. And he was feeling good. He'd come in at just the right time. He took a deep breath before he went on. Most every time he started talking about the Japs the others listened with deep respect. Because he knew more about them than the other customers. Pink worked for some Navy people and she told him what they said.

He looked along the line of waiting customers, watching their reaction to his words. Pretty soon they'd all be listening to him. And then he stopped talking abruptly. A soldier was sitting in the far corner of the shop, staring down at his shoes. Why, that's Scummy, he thought. He's at the same camp where Sam is. He forgot what he was about to say. He got up and walked over to Scummy. He swallowed all the questions about Sam that trembled on his lips.

"Hiya, son," he said. "Sure is good to see you."

As he shook hands with the boy he looked him over carefully. He's changed, he thought. He was older. There was something about his eyes that was different than before. He didn't seem to want to talk. After

that first quick look at William he kept his eyes down, staring at his shoes.

Finally William couldn't hold the question back any longer. It came out fast. "How's Sam?"

Scummy picked up a newspaper from the chair beside him. "He's all right," he mumbled. There was a long silence. Then he raised his head and looked directly at William. "Was the las' time I seen him." He put a curious emphasis on the word "las'."

William was conscious of a trembling that started in his stomach. It went all through his body. He was aware that conversation in the barbershop had stopped. There was a cone of silence in which he could hear the scraping noise of the razors—a harsh sound, loud in the silence. Al was putting thick oil on a customer's hair and he turned and looked with the hair-oil bottle still in his hand, tilted up over the customer's head. The men sitting in the tilted-back barber's chairs twisted their necks around—awkwardly, slowly—so they could look at Scummy.

"What you mean—the las' time?" William asked sharply. The words beat against his ears. He wished the men in the barbershop would start talking again, for he kept hearing his own words. "What you mean—the las' time?" Just as though he were saying them over and over again. Something had gone wrong with his breathing, too. He couldn't seem to get enough air in through his nose.

Scummy got up. There was something about him that William couldn't give a name to. It made the trembling in his stomach worse.

"The las' time I seen him he was O.K." Scummy's voice made a snarling noise in the barbershop.

One part of William's mind said, yes, that's it. It's hate that makes him look different. It's hate in his eyes. You can see it. It's in his voice, and you can hear it. He's filled with it.

"Since I seen him las'," he went on slowly, "he got shot by a white MP. Because he wouldn't go to the nigger end of a bus. He had a bullet put through his guts. He took the MP's gun away from him and shot the bastard in the shoulder." He put the newspaper down and started toward the door; when he reached it he turned around. "They court-martialed him," he said softly. "He got twenty years at hard labor. The notice was posted in the camp the day I left." Then he walked out of the shop. He didn't look back.

There was no sound in the barbershop as William watched him go down the street. Even the razors had stopped. Al was still holding the

hair-oil bottle over the head of his customer. The heavy oil was falling on the face of the man sitting in the chair. It was coming down slowly—one drop at a time.

The men in the shop looked at William and then looked away. He thought, I mustn't tell Pink. She mustn't ever get to know. I can go down to the mailbox early in the morning and I can get somebody else to look in it in the afternoon, so if a notice comes I can tear it up.

The barbers started cutting hair again. There was the murmur of conversation in the shop. Customers got up out of the tilted-back chairs. Someone said to him, "You can take my place."

He nodded and walked over to the empty chair. His legs were weak and shaky. He couldn't seem to think at all. His mind kept dodging away from the thought of Sam in prison. Instead the familiar detail of Sam's growing up kept creeping into his thoughts. All the time the boy was in grammar school he made good marks. Time went so fast it seemed like it was just overnight and he was in long pants. And then in high school.

He made the basketball team in high school. The whole school was proud of him, for his picture had been in one of the white papers. They got two papers that day. Pink cut the pictures out and stuck one in the mirror of the dresser in their bedroom. She gave him one to carry in his wallet.

While Al cut his hair he stared at himself in the mirror until he felt as though his eyes were crossed. First he thought, maybe it isn't true. Maybe Scummy was joking. But a man who was joking didn't look like Scummy looked. He wondered if Scummy was AWOL. That would be bad. He told himself sternly that he mustn't think about Sam here in the barbershop—wait until he got home.

He was suddenly angry with Annie May. She was just plain no good. Why couldn't something have happened to her? Why did it have to be Sam? Then he was ashamed. He tried to find an excuse for having wanted harm to come to her. It looked like all his life he'd wanted a little something for himself and Pink and then when Sam came along he forgot about those things. He wanted Sam to have all the things that he and Pink couldn't get. It got to be too late for them to have them. But Sam—again he told himself not to think about him. To wait until he got home and in bed.

Al took the cloth from around his neck, and he got up out of the chair. Then he was out on the street, heading toward home. The heat

that came from the pavement seeped through the soles of his shoes. He had forgotten how hot it was. He forced himself to wonder what it would be like to live in the country. Sometimes on hot nights like this, after he got home from work, he went to sit in the park. It was always cooler there. It would probably be cool in the country. But then it might be cold in winter—even colder than the city.

The instant he got in the house he took off his shoes and his shirt. The heat in the apartment was like a blanket—it made his skin itch and crawl in a thousand places. He went into the living room, where he leaned out of the window, trying to cool off. Not yet, he told himself. He mustn't think about it yet.

He leaned farther out of the window, to get away from the innumerable odors that came from the boxlike rooms in back of him. They cut off his breath, and he focused his mind on them. There was the greasy smell of cabbage and collard greens, smell of old wood and soapsuds and disinfectant, a lingering smell of gas from the kitchen stove, and over it all Annie May's perfume.

Then he turned his attention to the street. Up and down as far as he could see, folks were sitting on the stoops. Not talking. Just sitting. Somewhere up the street a baby wailed. A woman's voice rose sharply as she told it to shut up.

Pink wouldn't be home until late. The white folks she worked for were having a dinner party tonight. And no matter how late she got home on Saturday night she always stopped on Eighth Avenue to shop for her Sunday dinner. She never trusted him to do it. It's a good thing, he thought. If she ever took a look at me tonight she'd know there was something wrong.

A key clicked in the lock, and he drew back from the window. He was sitting on the couch when Annie May came in the room.

"You're home early, ain't you?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm going out again," she said.

"You shouldn't stay out so late like you did last night," he said mildly. He hadn't really meant to say it. But what with Sam——

"What you think I'm going to do? Sit here every night and make small talk with you?" Her voice was defiant. Loud.

"No," he said, and then added, "but nice girls ain't runnin' around the streets at four o'clock in the mornin'." Now that he'd started he couldn't seem to stop. "Oh, I know what time you come home. And it ain't right. If you don't stop it you can get some other place to stay."

"It's O.K. with me," she said lightly. She chewed the gum in her mouth so it made a cracking noise. "I don't know what Auntie Pink married a little runt like you for, anyhow. It wouldn't bother me a bit if I never saw you again." She walked toward the hall. "I'm going away for the week end," she added over her shoulder. "And I'll move out on Monday."

"What you mean for the week end?" he asked sharply. "Where you goin'?"

"None of your damn business," she said, and slammed the bathroom door hard.

The sharp sound of the door closing hurt his ears so that he winced, wondering why he had grown so sensitive to sounds in the last few hours. What'd she have to say that for, anyway, he asked himself. Five feet five wasn't so short for a man. He was taller than Pink, anyhow. Yet compared to Sam, he supposed he was a runt, for Sam had just kept on growing until he was six feet tall. At the thought he got up from the chair quickly, undressed, and got in bed. He lay there trying to still the trembling in his stomach; trying even now not to think about Sam, because it would be best to wait until Pink was in bed and sound asleep so that no expression on his face, no least little motion, would betray his agitation.

When he heard Pink come up the stairs just before midnight he closed his eyes. All of him was listening to her. He could hear her panting outside on the landing. There was a long pause before she put her key in the door. It took her all that time to get her breath back. She's getting old, he thought. I mustn't ever let her know about Sam.

She came into the bedroom, and he pretended to be asleep. He made himself breathe slowly. Evenly. Thinking I can get through tomorrow all right. I won't get up much before she goes to church. She'll be so busy getting dressed she won't notice me.

She went out of the room and he heard the soft murmur of her voice talking to Annie May. "Don't you pay no attention, honey. He don't mean a word of it. I know menfolks. They's always tired and out of sorts by the time Saturdays come around."

"But I'm not going to stay here any more."

"Yes, you is. You think I'm goin' to let my sister's child be turned out? You goin' to be right here."

They lowered their voices. There was laughter. Pink's deep and rich and slow. Annie May's high-pitched and nervous. Pink said, "You looks lovely, honey. Now, have a good time."

The front door closed. This time Annie May didn't slam it. He turned over on his back, making the springs creak. Instantly Pink came into the bedroom to look at him. He lay still, with his eyes closed, holding his breath for fear she would want to talk to him about what he'd said to Annie May and would wake him up. After she moved away from the door he opened his eyes.

There must be some meaning in back of what had happened to Sam. Maybe it was some kind of judgment from the Lord, he thought. Perhaps he shouldn't have stopped going to church. His only concession to Sunday was to put on his best suit. He wore it just that one day, and Pink pressed the pants late on Saturday night. But in the last few years it got so that every time he went to church he wanted to stand up and yell, "You Goddamn fools! How much more you goin' to take?"

He'd get to thinking about the street they lived on, and the sight of the minister with his clean white collar turned hind side to and the sound of his buttery voice were too much. One Sunday he'd actually gotten on his feet, for the minister was talking about the streets of gold up in heaven; the words were right on the tip of his tongue when Pink reached out and pinched his behind sharply. He yelped and sat down. Someone in back of him giggled. In spite of himself a slow smile had spread over his face. He stayed quiet through the rest of the service, but after that he didn't go to church at all.

This street where he and Pink lived was like the one where his mother had lived. It looked like he and Pink ought to have gotten further than his mother had. She had scrubbed floors, washed, and ironed in the white folks' kitchens. They were doing practically the same thing. That was another reason he stopped going to church. He couldn't figure out why these things had to stay the same, and if the Lord didn't intend it like that, why didn't He change it?

He began thinking about Sam again, so he shifted his attention to the sounds Pink was making in the kitchen. She was getting the rolls ready for tomorrow. Scrubbing the sweet potatoes. Washing the greens. Cutting up the chicken. Then the thump of the iron. Hot as it was, she was pressing his pants. He resisted the impulse to get up and tell her not to do it.

A little later, when she turned the light on in the bathroom, he knew she was getting ready for bed. And he held nis eyes tightly shut, made his body rigidly still. As long as he could make her think he was sound asleep she wouldn't take a real good look at him. One real good look

and she'd know there was something wrong. The bed sagged under her weight as she knelt down to say her prayers. Then she was lying down beside him. She sighed under her breath as her head hit the pillow.

He must have slept part of the time, but in the morning it seemed to him that he had looked up at the ceiling most of the night. He couldn't remember actually going to sleep.

When he finally got up, Pink was dressed and ready for church. He sat down in a chair in the living room away from the window, so the light wouldn't shine on his face. As he looked at her he wished that he could find relief from the confusion of his thoughts by taking part in the singing and the shouting that would go on in church. But he couldn't. And Pink never said anything about his not going to church. Only sometimes like today, when she was ready to go, she looked at him a little wistfully.

She had on her Sunday dress. It was made of a printed material—big red and black poppies splashed on a cream-colored background. He wouldn't let himself look right into her eyes, and in order that she wouldn't notice the evasiveness of his glance he stared at the dress. It fit snugly over her best corset, and the corset in turn constricted her thighs and tightly encased the rolls of flesh around her waist. She didn't move away, and he couldn't keep on inspecting the dress, so he shifted his gaze up to the wide cream-colored straw hat she was wearing far back on her head. Next he noticed that she was easing her feet by standing on the outer edges of the high-heeled patent-leather pumps she wore.

He reached out and patted her arm. "You look nice," he said, picking up the comic section of the paper.

She stood there looking at him while she pulled a pair of white cotton gloves over her roughened hands. "Is you all right, honey?" she asked.

"Course," he said, holding the paper up in front of his face.

"You shouldn't talk so mean to Annie May," she said gently.

"Yeah, I know," he said, and hoped she understood that he was apologizing. He didn't dare lower the paper while she was standing there looking at him so intently. Why doesn't she go, he thought.

"There's grits and eggs for breakfast."

"O.K." He tried to make his voice sound as though he were so absorbed in what he was reading that he couldn't give her all of his attention. She walked toward the door, and he lowered the paper to watch her, thinking that her legs looked too small for her body under the vastness of the printed dress, that womenfolks sure were funny—she's got

that great big pocketbook swinging on her arm and hardly anything in it. Sam used to love to tease her about the size of the handbags she carried.

When she closed the outside door and started down the stairs, the heat in the little room struck him in the face. He almost called her back so that he wouldn't be there by himself—left alone to brood over Sam. He decided that when she came home from church he would make love to her. Even in the heat the softness of her body, the smoothness of her skin, would comfort him.

He pulled his chair up close to the open window. Now he could let himself go. He could begin to figure out something to do about Sam. There's gotta be something, he thought. But his mind wouldn't stay put. It kept going back to the time Sam graduated from high school. Nineteen seventy-five his dark-blue suit had cost. He and Pink had figured and figured and finally they'd managed it. Sam had looked good in the suit; he was so tall and his shoulders were so broad it looked like a tailor-made suit on him. When he got his diploma everybody went wild—he'd played center on the basketball team, and a lot of folks recognized him.

The trembling in his stomach got worse as he thought about Sam. He was aware that it had never stopped since Scummy had said those words "the las' time." It had gone on all last night until now there was a tautness and a tension in him that left him feeling as though his eardrums were strained wide open, listening for sounds. They must be a foot wide open, he thought. Open and pulsing with the strain of being open. Even his nostrils were stretched open like that. He could feel them. And a weight behind his eyes.

He went to sleep sitting there in the chair. When he woke up his whole body was wet with sweat. It musta got hotter while I slept, he thought. He was conscious of an ache in his jawbones. It's from holding 'em shut so tight. Even his tongue—he'd been holding it so still in his mouth it felt like it was glued there.

Attracted by the sound of voices, he looked out of the window. Across the way a man and a woman were arguing. Their voices rose and fell on the hot, still air. He could look directly into the room where they were standing, and he saw that they were half undressed.

The woman slapped the man across the face. The sound was like a pistol shot, and for an instant William felt his jaw relax. It seemed to him that the whole block grew quiet and waited. He waited with it. The man grabbed his belt and lashed out at the woman. He watched the belt rise and fall against her brown skin. The woman screamed with

the regularity of clockwork. The street came alive again. There was the sound of voices, the rattle of dishes. A baby whined. The woman's voice became a murmur of pain in the background.

"I gotta get me some beer," he said aloud. It would cool him off. It would help him to think. He dressed quickly, telling himself that Pink wouldn't be home for hours yet and by that time the beer smell would be gone from his breath.

The street outside was full of kids playing tag. They were all dressed up in their Sunday clothes. Red socks, blue socks, danced in front of him all the way to the corner. The sight of them piled up the quivering in his stomach. Sam used to play in this block on Sunday afternoons. As he walked along, women thrust their heads out of the opened windows, calling to the children. It seemed to him that all the voices were Pink's voice saying, "You, Sammie, stop that runnin' in your good cloes!"

He was so glad to get away from the sight of the children that he ignored the heat inside the barroom of the hotel on the corner and determinedly edged his way past girls in sheer summer dresses and men in loud plaid jackets and tight-legged cream-colored pants until he finally reached the long bar.

There was such a sense of hot excitement in the place that he turned to look around him. Men with slicked, straightened hair were staring through half-closed eyes at the girls lined up at the bar. One man sitting at a table close by kept running his hand up and down the bare arm of the girl leaning against him. Up and down. Down and up. William winced and looked away. The jukebox was going full blast, filling the room with high, raw music that beat about his ears in a queer mixture of violence and love and hate and terror. He stared at the brilliantly colored moving lights on the front of the jukebox as he listened to it, wishing that he had stayed at home, for the music made the room hotter.

"Make it a beer," he said to the bartender.

The beer glass was cold. He held it in his hand, savoring the chill of it, before he raised it to his lips. He drank it down fast. Immediately he felt the air grow cooler. The smell of beer and whisky that hung in the room lifted.

"Fill it up again," he said. He still had that awful trembling in his stomach, but he felt as though he were really beginning to think. Really think. He found he was arguing with himself.

"Sam mighta been like this. Spendin' Sunday afternoons whorin'."

"But he was part of me and part of Pink. He had a chance——"

"Yeah. A chance to live in one of them hell-hole flats. A chance to get himself a woman to beat."

"He woulda finished college and got a good job. Mebbe been a druggist or a doctor or a lawyer——"

"Yeah. Or mebbe got himself a stable of women to rent out on the block——"

He licked the suds from his lips. The man at the table nearby had stopped stroking the girl's arm. He was kissing her—forcing her closer and closer to him.

"Yeah," William jeered at himself. "That coulda been Sam on a hot Sunday afternoon——"

As he stood there arguing with himself he thought it was getting warmer in the bar. The lights were dimmer. I better go home, he thought. I gotta live with this thing some time. Drinking beer in this place ain't going to help any. He looked out toward the lobby of the hotel, attracted by the sound of voices. A white cop was arguing with a frowzy-looking girl who had obviously had too much to drink.

"I got a right in here. I'm mindin' my own business," she said with one eye on the bar.

"Aw, go chase yourself." The cop gave her a push toward the door. She stumbled against a chair.

William watched her in amusement. "Better than a movie," he told himself.

She straightened up and tugged at her girdle. "You white son of a bitch," she said.

The cop's face turned a furious red. He walked toward the woman, waving his nightstick. It was then that William saw the soldier. Tall. Straight. Creases in his khaki pants. An overseas cap cocked over one eye. Looks like Sam looked that one time he was home on furlough, he thought.

The soldier grabbed the cop's arm and twisted the nightstick out of his hand. He threw it half the length of the small lobby. It rattled along the floor and came to a dead stop under a chair.

"Now what'd he want to do that for?" William said softly. He knew that night after night the cop had to come back to this hotel. He's the law, he thought, and he can't let—— Then he stopped thinking about him, for the cop raised his arm. The soldier aimed a blow at the cop's chin. The cop ducked and reached for his gun. The soldier turned to run.

It's happening too fast, William thought. It's like one of those horse-

race reels they run over fast at the movies. Then he froze inside. The quivering in his stomach got worse. The soldier was heading toward the door. Running. His foot was on the threshold when the cop fired. The soldier dropped. He folded up as neatly as the brown-paper bags Pink brought home from the store, emptied, and then carefully put in the kitchen cupboard.

The noise of the shot stayed in his eardrums. He couldn't get it out. "Jesus Christ!" he said. Then again, "Jesus Christ!" The beer glass was warm. He put it down on the bar with such violence some of the beer slopped over on his shirt. He stared at the wet place, thinking Pink would be mad as hell. Him out drinking in a bar on Sunday. There was a stillness in which he was conscious of the stink of the beer, the heat in the room, and he could still hear the sound of the shot. Somebody dropped a glass, and the tinkle of it hurt his ears.

Then everybody was moving toward the lobby. The doors between the bar and the lobby slammed shut. High, excited talk broke out.

The tall, thin black man standing next to him said, "That ties it. It ain't even safe here where we live. Not no more. I'm goin' to get me a white bastard of a cop and nail his hide to a street sign."

"Is the soldier dead?" someone asked.

"He wasn't movin' none," came the answer.

They pushed hard against the doors leading to the lobby. The doors stayed shut.

He stood still, watching them. The anger that went through him was so great that he had to hold on to the bar to keep from falling. He felt as though he were going to burst wide open. It was like having seen Sam killed before his eyes. Then he heard the whine of an ambulance siren. His eardrums seemed to be waiting to pick it up.

"Come on, what you waitin' for?" he snarled the words at the people milling around the lobby doors. "Come on!" he repeated, running toward the street.

The crowd followed him to the One Hundred Twenty-sixth Street entrance of the hotel. He got there in time to see a stretcher bearing a limp khaki-clad figure disappear inside the ambulance in front of the door. The ambulance pulled away fast, and he stared after it stupidly.

He hadn't known what he was going to do, but he felt cheated. Let down. He noticed that it was beginning to get dark. More and more people were coming into the street. He wondered where they'd come from and how they'd heard about the shooting so quickly. Every time

he looked around there were more of them. Curious, eager voices kept asking, "What happened? What happened?" The answer was always the same. Hard. Angry. "A white cop shot a soldier."

Someone said, "Come on to the hospital. Find out what happened to him."

In front of the hotel he had been in the front of the crowd. Now there were so many people in back of him and in front of him that when they started toward the hospital, he moved along with them. He hadn't decided to go—the forward movement picked him up and moved him along without any intention on his part. He got the feeling that he had lost his identity as a person with a free will of his own. It frightened him at first. Then he began to feel powerful. He was surrounded by hundreds of people like himself. They were all together. They could do anything.

As the crowd moved slowly down Eighth Avenue, he saw that there were cops lined up on both sides of the street. Mounted cops kept coming out of the side streets, shouting, "Break it up! Keep moving. Keep moving."

The cops were scared of them. He could tell. Their faces were dead white in the semidarkness. He started saying the words over separately to himself. Dead. White. He laughed. White cops. White MP's. They got us coming and going, he thought. He laughed again. Dead. White. The words were funny said separately like that. He stopped laughing suddenly because a part of his mind repeated: twenty years, twenty years.

He licked his lips. It was hot as all hell tonight. He imagined what it would be like to be drinking swallow after swallow of ice-cold beer. His throat worked and he swallowed audibly.

The big black man walking beside him turned and looked down at him. "You all right, brother?" he asked curiously.

"Yeah," he nodded. "It's them sons of bitches of cops. They're scared of us." He shuddered. The heat was terrible. The tide of hate quivering in his stomach made him hotter. "Wish I had some beer," he said.

The man seemed to understand not only what he had said but all the things he had left unsaid. For he nodded and smiled. And William thought this was an extraordinary night. It was as though, standing so close together, so many of them like this—as though they knew each other's thoughts. It was a wonderful thing.

The crowd carried him along. Smoothly. Easily. He wasn't really walking. Just gliding. He was aware that the shuffling feet of the crowd

made a muffled rhythm on the concrete sidewalk. It was slow, inevitable. An ominous sound, like a funeral march. With the regularity of a drumbeat. No. It's more like a pulse beat, he thought. It isn't a loud noise. It just keeps repeating over and over. But not that regular, because it builds up to something. It keeps building up.

The mounted cops rode their horses into the crowd. Trying to break it up into smaller groups. Then the rhythm was broken. Seconds later it started again. Each time the tempo was a little faster. He found he was breathing the same way. Faster and faster. As though he were running. There were more and more cops. All of them white. They had moved the colored cops out.

"They done that before," he muttered.

"What?" said the man next to him.

"They moved the colored cops out," he said.

He heard the man repeat it to someone standing beside him. It became part of the slow shuffling rhythm on the sidewalk. "They moved the colored cops." He heard it go back and back through the crowd until it was only a whisper of hate on the still, hot air. "They moved the colored cops."

As the crowd shuffled back and forth in front of the hospital, he caught snatches of conversation. "The soldier was dead when they put him in the ambulance." "Always tryin' to fool us." "Christ! Just let me get my hands on one of them cops."

He was thinking about the hospital and he didn't take part in any of the conversations. Even now across the long span of years he could remember the helpless, awful rage that had sent him hurrying home from this same hospital. Not saying anything. Getting home by some kind of instinct.

Pink had come to this hospital when she had had her last child. He could hear again the cold contempt in the voice of the nurse as she listened to Pink's loud grieving. "You people have too many children anyway," she said.

It left him speechless. He had his hat in his hand and he remembered how he wished afterward that he'd put it on in front of her to show her what he thought of her. As it was, all the bitter answers that finally surged into his throat seemed to choke him. No words would come out. So he stared at her lean, spare body. He let his eyes stay a long time on her flat breasts. White uniform. White shoes. White stockings. White skin.

Then he mumbled, "It's too bad your eyes ain't white, too." And turned on his heel and walked out.

It wasn't any kind of answer. She probably didn't even know what he was talking about. The baby dead, and all he could think of was to tell her her eyes ought to be white. White shoes, white stockings, white uniform, white skin, and blue eyes.

Staring at the hospital, he saw with satisfaction that frightened faces were appearing at the windows. Some of the lights went out. He began to feel that this night was the first time he'd ever really been alive. Tonight everything was going to be changed. There was a growing, swelling sense of power in him. He felt the same thing in the people around him.

The cops were aware of it, too, he thought. They were out in full force. Mounties, patrolmen, emergency squads. Radio cars that looked like oversize bugs crawled through the side streets. Waited near the curbs. Their white tops stood out in the darkness. "White folks riding in white cars." He wasn't aware that he had said it aloud until he heard the words go through the crowd. "White folks in white cars." The laughter that followed the words had a rough, raw rhythm. It repeated the pattern of the shuffling feet.

Someone said, "They got him at the station house. He ain't here." And the crowd started moving toward One Hundred Twenty-third Street.

Great God in the morning, William thought, everybody's out here. There were girls in thin summer dresses, boys in long coats and tight-legged pants, old women dragging kids along by the hand. A man on crutches jerked himself past to the rhythm of the shuffling feet. A blind man tapped his way through the center of the crowd, and it divided into two separate streams as it swept by him. At every street corner William noticed someone stopped to help the blind man up over the curb.

The street in front of the police station was so packed with people that he couldn't get near it. As far as he could see they weren't doing anything. They were simply standing there. Waiting for something to happen. He recognized a few of them: the woman with the loose, rolling eyes who sold shopping bags on One Hundred Twenty-fifth Street; the lucky-number peddler—the man with the white parrot on his shoulder; three sisters of the Heavenly Rest for All movement—barefooted women in loose white robes.

Then, for no reason that he could discover, everybody moved toward

One Hundred Twenty-fifth Street. The motion of the crowd was slower now because it kept increasing in size as people coming from late church services were drawn into it. It was easy to identify them, he thought. The women wore white gloves. The kids were all slicked up. Despite the more gradual movement he was still being carried along effortlessly, easily. When someone in front of him barred his way, he pushed against the person irritably, frowning in annoyance because the smooth forward flow of his progress had been stopped.

It was Pink who stood in front of him. He stopped frowning when he recognized her. She had a brown-paper bag tucked under her arm, and he knew she had stopped at the corner store to get the big bottle of cream soda she always brought home on Sundays. The sight of it made him envious, for it meant that this Sunday had been going along in an orderly, normal fashion for her while he—— She was staring at him so hard he was suddenly horribly conscious of the smell of the beer that had spilled on his shirt. He knew she had smelled it, too, by the tighter grip she took on her pocketbook.

"What you doing out here in this mob? A Sunday evening and you drinking beer," she said grimly.

For a moment he couldn't answer her. All he could think of was Sam. He almost said, "I saw Sam shot this afternoon," and he swallowed hard.

"This afternoon I saw a white cop kill a colored soldier," he said. "In the bar where I was drinking beer. I saw it. That's why I'm here. The glass of beer I was drinking went on my clothes. The cop shot him in the back. That's why I'm here."

He paused for a moment, took a deep breath. This was how it ought to be, he decided. She had to know sometime and this was the right place to tell her. In this semidarkness, in this confusion of noises, with the low, harsh rhythm of the footsteps sounding against the noise of the horses' hoofs.

His voice thickened. "I saw Scummy yesterday," he went on. "He told me Sam's doing time at hard labor. That's why we ain't heard from him. A white MP shot him when he wouldn't go to the nigger end of a bus. Sam shot the MP. They gave him twenty years at hard labor."

He knew he hadn't made it clear how to him the soldier in the bar was Sam; that it was like seeing his own son shot before his very eyes. I don't even know whether the soldier was dead, he thought. What made me tell her about Sam out here in the street like this, anyway? He realized with a sense of shock that he really didn't care that he had told her. He

felt strong, powerful, aloof. All the time he'd been talking he wouldn't look right at her. Now, suddenly, he was looking at her as though she were a total stranger. He was coldly wondering what she'd do. He was prepared for anything.

But he wasn't prepared for the wail that came from her throat. The sound hung in the hot air. It made the awful quivering in his stomach worse. It echoed and re-echoed the length of the street. Somewhere in the distance a horse whinnied. A woman standing way back in the crowd groaned as though the sorrow and the anguish in that cry were more than she could bear.

Pink stood there for a moment. Silent. Brooding. Then she lifted the big bottle of soda high in the air. She threw it with all her might. It made a wide arc and landed in the exact center of the plate-glass window of a furniture store. The glass crashed in with a sound like a gunshot.

A sigh went up from the crowd. They surged toward the broken window. Pink followed close behind. When she reached the window, all the glass had been broken in. Reaching far inside, she grabbed a small footstool and then turned to hurl it through the window of the dress shop next door. He kept close behind her, watching her as she seized a new missile from each store window that she broke.

Plate-glass windows were being smashed all up and down One Hundred Twenty-fifth Street—on both sides of the street. The violent, explosive sound fed the sense of power in him. Pink had started this. He was proud of her, for she had shown herself to be a fit mate for a man of his type. He stayed as close to her as he could. So in spite of the crashing, splintering sounds and the swarming, violent activity around him, he knew the exact moment when she lost her big straw hat; when she took off the high-heeled patent-leather shoes and flung them away, striding swiftly along in her stockinged feet. That her dress was hanging crooked on her.

He was right in back of her when she stopped in front of a hat store. She carefully appraised all the hats inside the broken window. Finally she reached out, selected a small hat covered with purple violets, and fastened it securely on her head.

"Woman's got good sense," a man said.

"Man, oh, man! Let me get in there," said a rawboned woman who thrust her way forward through the jam of people to seize two hats from the window.

A roar of approval went up from the crowd. From then on when a

window was smashed it was bare of merchandise when the people streamed past it. White folks owned these stores. They'd lose and lose and lose, he thought with satisfaction. The words "twenty years" re-echoed in his mind. I'll be an old man, he thought. Then: I may be dead before Sam gets out of prison.

The feeling of great power and strength left him. He was so confused by its loss that he decided this thing happening in the street wasn't real. It was so dark, there were so many people shouting and running about, that he almost convinced himself he was having a nightmare. He was aware that his hearing had now grown so acute he could pick up the tiniest sounds: the quickened breathing and the soft, gloating laughter of the crowd; even the sound of his own heart beating. He could hear these things under the noise of the breaking glass, under the shouts that were coming from both sides of the street. They forced him to face the fact that this was no dream but a reality from which he couldn't escape. The quivering in his stomach kept increasing as he walked along.

Pink was striding through the crowd just ahead of him. He studied her to see if she, too, was feeling as he did. But the outrage that ran through her had made her younger. She was tireless. Most of the time she was leading the crowd. It was all he could do to keep up with her, and finally he gave up the attempt—it made him too tired.

He stopped to watch a girl who was standing in a store window, clutching a clothes model tightly around the waist. "What's she want that for?" he said aloud. For the model had been stripped of clothing by the passing crowd, and he thought its pinkish torso was faintly obscene in its resemblance to a female figure.

The girl was young and thin. Her back was turned toward him, and there was something so ferocious about the way her dark hands gripped the naked model that he resisted the onward movement of the crowd to stare in fascination. The girl turned around. Her nervous hands were tight around the dummy's waist. It was Annie May.

"Ah, no!" he said, and let his breath come out with a sigh.

Her hands crept around the throat of the model and she sent it hurtling through the air above the heads of the crowd. It landed short of a window across the street. The legs shattered. The head rolled toward the curb. The waist snapped neatly in two. Only the torso remained whole and in one piece.

Annie May stood in the empty window and laughed with the crowd when someone kicked the torso into the street. He stood there, staring

at her. He felt that now for the first time he understood her. She had never had anything but badly paying jobs—working for young white women who probably despised her. She was like Sam on that bus in Georgia. She didn't want just the nigger end of things, and here in Harlem there wasn't anything else for her. All along she'd been trying the only way she knew how to squeeze out of life a little something for herself.

He tried to get closer to the window where she was standing. He had to tell her that he understood. And the crowd, tired of the obstruction that he had made by standing still, swept him up and carried him past. He stopped thinking and let himself be carried along on a vast wave of feeling. There was so much plate glass on the sidewalk that it made a grinding noise under the feet of the hurrying crowd. It was a dull, harsh sound that set his teeth on edge and quickened the trembling of his stomach.

Now all the store windows that he passed were broken. The people hurrying by him carried tables, lamps, shoeboxes, clothing. A woman next to him held a wedding cake in her hands—it went up in tiers of white frosting with a small bride and groom mounted at the top. Her hands were bleeding, and he began to look closely at the people nearest him. Most of them, too, had cuts on their hands and legs. Then he saw there was blood on the sidewalk in front of the windows; blood dripping down the jagged edges of the broken windows. And he wanted desperately to go home.

He was conscious that the rhythm of the crowd had changed. It was faster, and it had taken on an ugly note. The cops were using their nightsticks. Police wagons drew up to the curbs. When they pulled away, they were full of men and women who carried loot from the stores in their hands.

The police cars slipping through the streets were joined by other cars with loudspeakers on top. The voices coming through the loudspeakers were harsh. They added to the noise and the confusion. He tried to listen to what the voices were saying. But the words had no meaning for him. He caught one phrase over and over: "Good people of Harlem." It made him feel sick.

He repeated the words "of Harlem." We don't belong anywhere, he thought. There ain't no room for us anywhere. There wasn't no room for Sam in a bus in Georgia. There ain't no room for us here in New York. There ain't no place but top floors. The top-floor black people. And he laughed, and the sound stuck in his throat.

After that he snatched a suit from the window of a men's clothing store. It was a summer suit. The material felt crisp and cool. He walked away with it under his arm. He'd never owned a suit like that. He simply sweated out the summer in the same dark pants he wore in winter. Even while he stroked the material, a part of his mind sneered—you got summer pants; Sam's got twenty years.

He was surprised to find that he was almost at Lenox Avenue, for he hadn't remembered crossing Seventh. At the corner the cops were shoving a group of young boys and girls into a police wagon. He paused to watch. Annie May was in the middle of the group. She had a yellow-fox jacket dangling from one hand.

"Annie May!" he shouted. "Annie May!" The crowd pushed him along faster and faster. She hadn't seen him. He let himself be carried forward by the movement of the crowd. He had to find Pink and tell her that the cops had taken Annie May.

He peered into the dimness of the street ahead of him, looking for her; then he elbowed his way toward the curb so that he could see the other side of the street. He forgot about finding Pink, for directly opposite him was the music store that he passed every night coming home from work. Young boys and girls were always lounging on the sidewalk in front of it. They danced a few steps while they listened to the records being played inside the shop. All the records sounded the same—a terribly magnified woman's voice bleating out a blues song in a voice that sounded to him like that of an animal in heat—an old animal, tired and beaten, but with an insinuating know-how left in her. The white men who went past the store smiled as their eyes lingered on the young girls swaying to the music.

"White folks got us comin' and goin'. Backwards and forwards," he muttered. He fought his way out of the crowd and walked toward a no-parking sign that stood in front of the store. He rolled it up over the curb. It was heavy, and the effort made him pant. It took all his strength to send it crashing through the glass on the door.

Almost immediately an old woman and a young man slipped inside the narrow shop. He followed them. He watched them smash the records that lined the shelves. He hadn't thought of actually breaking the records, but once he started he found the crisp, snapping noise pleasant. The feeling of power began to return. He didn't like these records, so they had to be destroyed.

When they left the music store there wasn't a whole record left. The

old woman came out of the store last. As he hurried off up the street he could have sworn he smelled the sharp, acrid smell of smoke. He turned and looked back. He was right. A thin wisp of smoke was coming through the store door. The old woman had long since disappeared in the crowd.

Farther up the street he looked back again. The fire in the record shop was burning merrily. It was making a glow that lit up that part of the street. There was a new rhythm now. It was faster and faster. Even the voices coming from the loudspeakers had taken on the urgency of speed.

Fire trucks roared up the street. He threw his head back and laughed when he saw them. That's right, he thought. Burn the whole damn place down. It was wonderful. Then he frowned. "Twenty years at hard labor." The words came back to him. He was a fool. Fire wouldn't wipe that out. There wasn't anything that would wipe it out.

He remembered then that he had to find Pink. To tell her about Annie May. He overtook her in the next block. She's got more stuff, he thought. She had a table lamp in one hand, a large enamel kettle in the other. The lightweight summer coat draped across her shoulders was so small it barely covered her enormous arms. She was watching a group of boys assault the steel gates in front of a liquor store. She frowned at them so ferociously he wondered what she was going to do. Hating liquor the way she did, he half expected her to cuff the boys and send them on their way up the street.

She turned and looked at the crowd in back of her. When she saw him she beckoned to him. "Hold these," she said. He took the lamp, the kettle, and the coat she held out to him, and he saw that her face was wet with perspiration. The print dress was darkly stained with it.

She fastened the hat with the purple flowers securely on her head. Then she walked over to the gate. "Git out the way," she said to the boys. Bracing herself in front of the gate, she started tugging at it. The gate resisted. She pulled at it with a sudden access of such furious strength that he was frightened. Watching her, he got the feeling that the resistance of the gate had transformed it in her mind. It was no longer a gate—it had become the world that had taken her son, and she was wreaking vengeance on it.

The gate began to bend and sway under her assault. Then it was down. She stood there for a moment, staring at her hands—big drops of blood oozed slowly over the palms. Then she turned to the crowd that had stopped to watch.

"Come on, you niggers," she said. Her eyes were little and evil and triumphant. "Come on and drink up the white man's liquor." As she strode off up the street, the beflowered hat dangled precariously from the back of her head.

When he caught up with her she was moaning, talking to herself in husky whispers. She stopped when she saw him and put her hand on his arm.

"It's hot, ain't it?" she said, panting.

In the midst of all this violence, the sheer commonplaceness of her question startled him. He looked at her closely. The rage that had been in her was gone, leaving her completely exhausted. She was breathing too fast in uneven gasps that shook her body. Rivulets of sweat streamed down her face. It was as though her triumph over the metal gate had finished her. The gate won anyway, he thought.

"Let's go home, Pink," he said. He had to shout to make his voice carry over the roar of the crowd, the sound of breaking glass.

He realized she didn't have the strength to speak, for she only nodded in reply to his suggestion. Once we get home she'll be all right, he thought. It was suddenly urgent that they get home, where it was quiet, where he could think, where he could take something to still the tremors in his stomach. He tried to get her to walk a little faster, but she kept slowing down until, when they entered their own street, it seemed to him they were barely moving.

In the middle of the block she stood still. "I can't make it," she said. "I'm too tired."

Even as he put his arm around her she started going down. He tried to hold her up, but her great weight was too much for him. She went down slowly, inevitably, like a great ship capsizing. Until all of her huge body was crumpled on the sidewalk.

"Pink," he said. "Pink. You gotta get up," he said it over and over again.

She didn't answer. He leaned over and touched her gently. Almost immediately afterward he straightened up. All his life, moments of despair and frustration had left him speechless—strangled by the words that rose in his throat. This time the words poured out.

He sent his voice raging into the darkness and the awful confusion of noises. "The sons of bitches," he shouted. "The sons of bitches."

# THE CHURCH

by

Robert Lowry

If only her legs weren't skinny. But it wasn't that, either. Yes, the other girls were different, Lupe knew that. Gracie little and devilish and wanting all the boys just crazy about her, but taking what she could while she could get it. Myrtle, oh, she loved Myrtle, but Myrtle was older and didn't believe in anything but just one night at a time, and sometimes she would look at Myrtle even in Herb's Place, where everybody was supposed to be happy, and she would think how sad Myrtle was, and Myrtle would have moisture in her eyes.

Her legs were skinny but she knew she was beautiful, she knew she had a long oval of a face with dark eyes that she could do things with under the long black lashes, and she knew how to fix her black heavy hair with a white comb so it shaped itself around her long face and made her beautiful. But the best things were the earrings she bought for seventy-five cents at Carmer's Store, they were just large round gold circles but she knew they were for her and she never went out without them.

And yet she was not happy and she could not help but compare herself with the other girls. They were not alike, Gracie was little and cute and impish and Myrtle was sad and older and didn't care who it was just so it was someone every night, and Lily was Lily, not pretty but quiet and nice. But somehow when she thought of them they were all together, not happy yet each of them doing what they wanted. And over here was she all alone and not doing what she wanted and somehow different from them. And sometimes she thought it was because she wasn't beautiful enough, all over. And she looked at her skinny legs sometimes in the mirror.

Or was it because they all lived together, those three, and she lived across town with her mother and father and her baby, Anna Maria, who was two years old.

They lived in the church those three. It had been a Negro church, made of adobe and all crumbling, but now it was partitioned with wallboard, with doorways cut out and purple curtains dropped over them instead of doors. And on the front of their church house was the inscription, hand-carved, THIS CHURCH BLD. BY REV. J. HERBERT WASHINGTON, WITH ASST. OF and then there were four other names. In great big letters under this, also hand-carved in the soft stone, were the words J. HERBERT WASHINGTON, PASTOR. It had been a Negro church. It was funny that the three Mexican girls and Myrtle's mamma lived in it, and Myrtle's three little brothers and sisters. And the old white cat, Chi-Chi.

Lupe had been born in that Mexican-border town, and she had grown up in it. It was a little town, with one main street where the shops and theater were. Beyond the town was the copper smelter, throwing a blanket of sulphur smoke over the town and over the desert round about.

When she was little, one Mexican kid playing with the other Mexican kids on her street, the town had seemed very big and interesting, and it was an adventure to go along the main street and just look in the windows or sit in the movie. Going to school and just living then. Having crushes on boys. Running around the town at night, her mother thinking she was at a girl friend's house.

Why didn't the town look like it had looked? Now she only felt that she had to go away. Why hadn't she gone away when she had the chance? Everything was vague, and sometimes it seemed to her all she knew about her life was contained in the photographs she carried in her purse and showed to boys who took her out.

Her troubles had come with the troubles of the whole world, that's the way it seemed. She had got married to Jack Gilias, a tall slim Mexican boy, when the war began, she did not know why, it was just that she was eighteen and wanted bad to get married and out of her mother's and father's house. But it had been foolish, she had never left her own house, he had just come there to live, and made her pregnant, and fought with her, and then gone away and enlisted in the army. They did not write to each other. Once he came home on a furlough and showed her his girl's picture. A new girl, in California. "How do you like her, pretty good, eh?" Well, she didn't care. It hurt bad but she didn't say a word. "I thought you came to see the baby, not to talk to me," she told him in

Spanish. "Well, she's more fun than you," he said, and that hurt too but she didn't say a word.

The baby was two years old and that was the only time Jack Gilias came, and the baby did not even know him.

So when Jack went away, that first and only time he was back, she knew she had to do something, she had to do it and change her life. Or she did not know what would become of her.

Lily and Gracie and Myrtle did the same thing every night and the same thing every day. They worked in restaurants in the daytime and went to Herb's Place for dancing after work. They always ended up with soldiers at the table. And the soldiers waltzed them around, dancing to the jukebox music, getting Patsy to bring them beer and Tom Collinses. Lily had an advantage over the other girls, she couldn't speak a word of English, so she would turn her head on one side and smile whenever any of the soldiers said anything. She would shake her finger at them as if they were being naughty. They thought she was plenty cute and wonderful.

Lupe would go along with them and the boys would dance with her. She loved to dance, and she was good and glamorous to see dancing, wearing that mysterious smile on her face.

Sometimes a soldier would want to walk home with her. She didn't care, she let him walk her home. But she made him stop at the corner and let him kiss her, then pushed away, for they were hot and full of pleas, these soldiers. And she would run around the corner into her house. She would undress quickly, then jump into bed with Anna Maria, putting her arms around the little kid and hugging her close.

The boys knew Myrtle and Lily and tiny impish Gracie. They knew that when a boy walked *them* home he slept with them. But Lupe had them buffaloed, they tried to kid each other about getting Lupe, but each knew none of them had got Lupe.

Sometimes Lupe would even walk up to the church with Myrtle and Lily and three boys. They would all go into the back room and then there'd be much giggling and laughing and they'd sit on the bed or dance. Pretty soon Myrtle, dark large-eyed large-nosed Myrtle, would think in a panic of the old mamma sleeping in the front room and she would shush them all. "Shhh-shhh-shhh," she would say. "If Mamma wakes up! Oh, my God!" Throwing up her hands. And then for a moment you could hear a pin drop in the room. The soldiers were young drafted kids with sunburned faces, all of them from faraway places like

Poughkeepsie and Hammond, Indiana. They were a little nervous with the Mexican girls because they'd never gone out with them before and the prospect of the big fat mamma running in on them mad as a bull, what with their intentions and everything, pretty well sobered them. But then in a moment the girls would be off again, laughing and dancing around and giggling and singing the jazz songs in unison and sometimes whispering in each other's ears, as if there weren't any mamma within five miles. The walls of that room were covered with photos, all of them of relatives of the three girls, and of Lupe too, for she was Myrtle's cousin. It was hard to think of any Mexican in that border town Lupe was not related to, near or far. One of the soldiers looking for something to say would always come out with, "Who is everybody here? We haven't been introduced," then wave at all the starched-looking photos on the walls and the dresser. The girls would just laugh and wave and say, "Those are our relatives," it was too complicated explaining, everybody was their relative!

After a half-hour or so of laughing and dancing with the girls the soldiers would begin to put the pressure on, leaning them back on the bed. Myrtle was easy, she lay back easily and kissed her soldier, with her heavy rich lips. She wanted him and she did not even bother to try to act. But Lily would always come out of it, saying, "Let's dance." She was so quiet and plain and nice, just a round-faced Mexican girl with rather stringy hair. She and Myrtle were the best of friends, for Gracie usually was going out with one soldier steady and didn't go up to Herb's Place to pick up just anybody very often. Myrtle and Lily had a little understanding between them that one would not take a boy for the night without the other taking her boy too. This was pretty necessary because they both slept in the same bed.

A boy would press thin oval-faced Lupe back on the bed too, and touch her where it made her heart pound to be touched. But she did not let herself be carried away.

"Oh, come on and stay," Myrtle would say to Lupe when she would stand up to go. "Come on, I'll tell your mother in the morning you stayed over here last night. You know you want to." And the pink-faced soldier kid from Minneapolis would be sitting there, looking eager and expectant.

But Lupe would get up and go.

"It's the baby," she would say. "If it weren't for the baby I would stay."

And then there would be the walk along the main street of the town

back to the grocery store at the corner of Lupe's street. And she would leave the boy there panting and sweating and pleading, and run around the corner into her house.

Inside the house, getting undressed quickly, she would still be able to see the young soldier's bright eager eyes so close to hers.

Her small town had changed with the war, changed with the coming of the thousands of soldiers to the air base eight miles out, those young eager men who flooded the four or five cafés every night, looking for something they could never really find.

And sometimes it seemed to Lupe that all of her trouble had come with the world's trouble. That the excitement of the crazy world had driven her to marry Jack Gilias. And then the baby coming, and him going away to Australia. Maybe he didn't love her—but anyhow he wouldn't have been able to go away if it hadn't been for the war.

The truth was that Lupe did not believe in love.

She could not believe in love because she had never seen any of it close up.

She had seen it when Clark Gable had it for Myrna Loy at the Strand, but those people did things she didn't believe in, very far away in a shiny world. She liked comedies best. She didn't care whether there was love in the picture or not. Myrtle and Gracie and Lily wanted love, but Lupe was different. She liked Laurel and Hardy. And Pluto the Pup. She used to get all worked up in the movies and clap her hands and scream and act like a kid.

Myrtle and Gracie and Lily felt it satisfactory only when they cried. They used to let all their troubles flow out when Melvyn Douglas had to leave Rosalind Russell behind him. It was all so sad and they loved it dearly. Feeling full and rich with sorrow when they came out to the hot bright street afterwards, big tears in their eyes and their hands clasped tight together.

No, they were over there and she was over here—in everything!

And she wanted so much to get away from her life.

She loved those three living in the old Negro church, with all their little brothers and sisters and cousins and God knows what playing outside all day. But somehow she could never make her life complete and full as their lives were.

The truth was she was a very lonely and melancholy girl.

She worked in the restaurants of the town. During the two years since

Jack Gilias had left her and gone off to war she had worked in perhaps five or six, she had lost track of them. Now she was assistant waitress at the Carver Hotel. Really all she did was set the tables and take away the dirty dishes. Forty-eight a month, and she worked sometimes ten hours a day. The hotel was the best building in town, built with an eye for the tourist trade going through to Mexico and really much more elaborate than the town could have afforded. It was owned by a thin crabby effeminate man who rushed here and there all hours of the day and night under the direction of his huge black-browed wife who was always coming into the restaurant looking for him. Lupe hated those two and she always knew she would quit that place too, soon. It seemed there was no place in that town she wanted to work. She blamed the town for being so unhappy. If she had only not wasted her chances by getting married and having the baby. If she had only gone away—someplace.

Someplace! That was the romantic thing! Not to go to El Paso or Tucson, for they might be disappointing, but to go Someplace—a Romantic Place.

Somehow she knew she would go someday, all right.

One night just before closing two soldiers came into the restaurant and sat down over in the corner, as if to avoid all the officers and civilians in the place.

When Lupe brought them water the one soldier winked his nose at her.

She stopped surprised and looked at him more closely, but he just looked right back at her without even smiling.

He seemed young, as young as she was, with a square face and round direct-looking eyes.

So she went away and got silverware and napkins and came back and just as she had put them on the table and was ready to leave, she looked at the square-faced boy again. And the nose winked!

She could not help laughing, it was so unexpected. And this time the two boys laughed too. She looked right into the eyes of the one with the square face and it was like falling through space for her to look into those eyes. It was like going on a long journey, all in a moment, and returning. She found herself breathing a little hard, as if she had run all the way.

"What's your name?" the square-faced soldier said.

At first she was going just to walk away, but then she found herself standing looking at him.

"Lupe," she said.

The soldier laughed.

"What's so funny about that?" Lupe said.

"I don't know," the soldier said. "Do you work around here all the time?"

"Sure I do," she said.

She looked around quickly to see if fat Mrs. McCartle was anywhere in sight, and the square-faced boy, seeing this, said, "Aren't you allowed to talk to us?"

"Oh, I can do anything," Lupe said, "just so she doesn't see me."

Both the boys laughed again. The other soldier wore glasses and had a squinted-up sunburned face and was very thin.

"That's the way with us out at camp," the square-faced boy said.

While they were eating Lupe could not keep from glancing at them from across the room.

She was all stirred up inside and her heart was pounding.

She broke a glass and as she was sweeping it up she saw the square-faced young soldier looking at her and smiling as if he understood how awful she felt about breaking something.

She wanted to run right over to him and say, "Let's go somewhere far away that you will have to take trains and boats to get there. Someplace——"

He will ask me, she thought, getting forks and knives back in the kitchen.

And she could not wait till they finished with their meal, so she could go back to his table.

But when she did go back he did not ask her. She smiled at him when he said, "Well, here you are again," but he did not ask her.

She knew that he wanted to ask her, and she wanted him to ask her, but she could not think of anything to say to make it easier for him.

And so he and the thin glasses-wearing boy went away.

He was cute, she thought, stacking up their dishes.

He was real cute.

When she got off work at nine-fifteen he was standing out in front, with his back to the entrance of the hotel.

He turned around. "Hello," he said. And they began to walk up the street together.

They went into the Red Moon café, into one of the booths in back,

and they both drank Tom Collinses. He seemed very young, and very square-faced, and he had a habit of meeting your eyes with his sort-of-squinting eyes, then looking off across the room quick.

"I thought maybe you'd come along," he said. "I thought I'd come back. What would you have done tonight if I hadn't?"

Lupe looked at him and then she too looked away, as if already she were getting his habits.

"Oh," she said. And now he was looking at her without taking his eyes away. "Oh, I'd have gone home maybe." What I say now will be what he will think of me forever, she thought. "Or maybe I'd have gone over to the church, you know those kids who live in a church, and maybe we'd have all gone up to Herb's Place, I don't know. . . . You know, I'm sick of this town," she said. And then she was telling him everything, and now he did not take his eyes from her at all, he just listened. "Sometimes I want to go away so bad, there's nothing here any more. When I was little the town seemed so different, now it doesn't seem like anything at all, there's just nobody here any more. You know, sometimes I want to be an army nurse. I don't know, sometimes I think I will. But I have a little baby. I was married, you know, but now that's all over. We're separated. He doesn't even want to know me any more. I don't care. He has other girls now. He's in the army, in Australia. Look, I'll show you my baby——" And she pulled out her worn leather case with the picture in it. He looked at the baby. It was really a very cute little one, with big eyes, and legs spread wide apart sailor fashion, the way babies have to stand. He looked at the picture of the baby, and then he looked at others, Lupe's mother and father, both of whom stared into the camera soberly, her sister Dinah a cute kid of fifteen with a smile, chunkier than thin oval-faced Lupe.

And the square-faced soldier with the nice eyes told her all the places he had been, all over America, since he'd been drafted. He hated the army with the same kind of hopeless hate she had for the town. As Hank talked, telling about the three-day pass he and a friend of his had taken and gone far up into the mountains outside Denver and just lain on their backs and looked at the stars, she began to feel very close to him. She almost forgot he was a soldier and would go away someday and not come back. She began to feel somehow that she could go along with him, wherever he went.

The door opened and all the kids came in. She put her face out of the booth and here came Myrtle and Lily and two soldiers. Her soldier said

"Hi" to them and they all sat down in the next booth. Every two minutes Myrtle had to be peeking over the top, sharpening her finger at Lupe. Lupe couldn't help laughing. And just when everything calmed down, here came Lily's little round dark face around the corner of the booth.

"They're so crazy," Lupe said to Hank. "But they're really nice to know. I just love Lily, I don't know what I'd do if she ever went away."

The two girls and their soldiers stood up and hung over Lupe's booth, laughing down at her and the square-faced boy, and then they went away and left Lupe there with him.

He walked her home, down deserted G Avenue.

He slipped his fingers into hers and she let him. He put his arm around her waist and she didn't care.

"You're so little!" he said. And she just held on to his hand, not being able to think of what to say.

"You're so pretty," he said, walking so close to her she could feel his hip move against hers.

"No," she said.

At the corner where the grocery store was she stopped. "I live just around the corner," she said. "I think I've got to leave you here——"

He pressed her into the doorway and kissed her full mouth hard and searched her body with his hands. "Look, Lupe——" he said.

She broke away from him and ran around the corner into her house and slammed the door.

She lay on the bed close to her baby and sobbed, she didn't know why.

But he was there the next night, and she went with him. They danced at Herb's Place, and he danced every dance with her so no other boy could get hold of her.

Now they did not talk very much, they just looked at each other. It seemed to Lupe that she had told him all that she had to say.

And this night too she left him at the corner, a panting soldier crazy for her.

The next night she went up to Herb's Place with him, and Myrtle was there with a soldier, a little drunk both of them, whirling around the dance floor and laughing. Grace and Lily had gone to a movie.

At twelve o'clock, when the café closed and the soldier had to get off the streets, Myrtle, who was not sad now but happy with her soldier for the night, a chunky red-faced boy who stuttered, pulled Lupe along down the street with her.

The four of them went around to the back door of the church, where everything was dark. Lupe and Hank and the red-faced boy waited out on the porch while Myrtle went in and turned on the light.

The four of them sat down on the bed, and Myrtle began to hum a song. She held the red-faced boy's hand and smiled at him. Sweat stood out on his forehead. Then suddenly Myrtle and the boy were lying back on the bed and he was over her like a big clumsy bear.

When Myrtle got up she was laughing and flushed. "Come here, Lupe," she said, and dragged her out in the corridor, into a tiny bedroom. "Look, you can sleep here tonight," she said. "The kids are over at Arnandez' house. . . . Please stay, kid," Myrtle said, and squeezed Lupe's hand.

And then they went back and sat down on the bed again, and when Lupe kissed the square-faced soldier she knew she would have to stay. She clung to him on the bed and kissed him the way she'd learned how to kiss, as if she wanted to swallow him, put him right inside of her. . . .

Very early in the morning they walked down the street together and said good-by at the corner. They were so tired they could not speak.

When he didn't come the next night she could not imagine what was the matter with him. She went to Herb's Place but she didn't find him there. She went to the Rio Grande Café and the Red Moon, but he wasn't there. Maybe he's on detail or something, she thought, and went home to bed.

But he did not come the next night either, and it was then she began to know that he would not come back again. Or if he did come back, it would not be for her, and he would go away and stay away.

If it would be like that, she did not want it.

Working away at the Carver Dining Room, stacking the dirty plates, thoughts ran through her mind like mad.

I will not get away, ever, she thought. I hate this town and I've got to get away. But there's my baby and I can't ever get away. Now I know he will not take me away. I thought he would, but now I know he won't.

Now I know that no one will ever take me away.

I will live here in this town now, and I will never make it.

Maybe it's because I've got skinny legs. Maybe that's why he didn't come back. My legs are skinny, but I know my face isn't ugly. If that's the reason he didn't come back, I don't care.

I don't care about anything. I don't care about anything now.

I am lost in this town. I will just be resigned to it. I will never go far away.

A tear ran out of her eye, and she turned her face down to the dishes she was stacking.

She carried them back to the kitchen.

Now I know that I will have to have as much fun as I can. It's all there is left to do. Then I will die.

Myrtle and Lily and Gracie are my only friends. I will have to stay close to them. I will be just like them.

Now I know what I will have to be, she thought. There is no other way for me. So I will be just that.

She felt this desperation grow in her. She didn't care now. She would be just what she had to be.

She went up to Herb's Place, and there were Myrtle and Lily. They had three soldiers at the table with them. Lupe sat down and began to drink. A tall thin sergeant danced her all around till she was dizzy.

She got drunker and drunker. Herb's was packed with soldiers and girls, a regular madhouse of jukebox music and waitresses dashing here and there delivering drinks. Dozens of faces, some laughing, some just drunk, stuck out of the booths. Once as Lupe was dancing she thought she saw Hank's face but she didn't even bother to look back to see, it hurt her but she didn't care. She didn't care about anything any more. "I don't care about anything any more!" she heard herself saying, and vaguely she could see Myrtle's and Lily's faces looking at her out of a red fog of faces. "I don't care! I don't care!" she heard herself laughing as loud as she could laugh. And the thin-faced sergeant had small red cruel eyes, and he pinched her under the table. She didn't care! She hated the sergeant but she didn't care, and when twelve o'clock came and they all got up to go, she went along with them, to the church, because she didn't care.

As they walked along the avenue Myrtle and Lily tried to hush her, she screamed so loud, but she wouldn't hush, she screamed louder.

Because she didn't care. She didn't care what happened to her now. This was what she had been looking for! She was free of her yearning to get away, free of everything, lost, and she didn't care.

"I don't care!" she shouted, letting the sergeant with the little red eyes pull her along.

# THE REEF

by

Basil Heatter

The morning sun glared from the surface of the St. Margaret. The water lay still and dead-looking at the ebb tide. A big heron stood on one leg in the shallow water along the bar. When he heard the boat coming he turned and looked at it and then made a little run and put his wings out and lifted himself into the air.

Behind them the river passed through the town and then grew narrow and sluggish as it ran off into the swamps. But here it was wide and healthy-looking as it ran down to meet the sea, although the channel lay narrow and devious between sand bars. The *LazyLou* traveled smoothly and quietly between the buoys. She left a wake behind her on the shining water like the wet track of a snail over stone. Her bow wave ran off in ever-widening sweeps, rocking the little boats moored along the shore.

They crawled on down the river until they came to the channel marker that indicated the entrance to the inlet. Here, where the ocean tumbled in to meet the river, the surf came boiling over the bar and churned around the marker. A line of spray whipped along the reef and hung shimmering for a moment in the clear air.

Joe Burns retarded his throttle and looked carefully at the surf. It was not a dangerous passage if you knew how to do it. The *LazyLou* circled cautiously, and then, when the moment looked right, Joe gave her full power and she surged ahead and was across the bar and safely out to sea.

Outside, a fine offshore breeze was blowing. It pushed them steadily along so that in a few minutes the reef was only a tossing white line be-

hind them. Gulls circled lazily overhead and then sailed away again. To the north the coast ran off in a curving white sweep dotted by palms.

Joe listened to the growling of the Sterling. That timing was still a little off. He would work on it tonight. Or maybe if Mr. Harkness wanted to take a little nap around lunchtime he would have a chance to do it then.

Mr. Harkness came up and stood alongside him. "How's she look?" he asked.

"Good," Joe said. "A little chop, but a good feeding day. Maybe we'll hit into them."

"Not maybe, Captain, absolutely. At these rates we don't want any maybes." Mr. Harkness was very jovial.

"Sure, but there's a lot of luck in it too."

"Oh, we've got that. I've always been lucky," Mr. Harkness said.

Joe set his compass course at zero nine five degrees. He would hold that course for forty-five minutes at twelve knots and that would bring him to the spot he had in mind.

"How do you happen to call her the *LazyLou*?" Mr. Harkness asked.

"I had a friend named Lou Kenicott. We always figured to go into this business together. Lou claimed it was a nice, lazy life. We were planning on calling our boat *Jolou*, after our two names. But the way it wound up there was only one of us, so now I call her the *LazyLou* as a sort of tribute to Lou Kenicott."

"He was in the army too?"

"Yes."

"Got killed, huh?"

"Yes."

"Too bad. What was your outfit?"

"Infantry, Sixth Army."

"The Sixth, eh? Now where was that, North Africa?"

"No, Southwest Pacific."

"Pretty hot down there?"

"Pretty hot."

"See any real action?"

"A little bit."

"But not the big stuff. Sort of skirmishes, hey?"

"Yeah, sort of skirmishes," Joe said. A sort of skirmish in a sort of place called Buna on a sort of beach where the men were sort of dead. Maggot Beach, the place was called. It was eight degrees under the equa-

tor and when men fell on that beach the sun and the insects turned their bodies to liquid, festering corruption. With a nice offshore breeze like this one today you could smell that beach twenty miles out to sea. That was where Lou Kenicott left his dreams about the *Jolou*.

Mr. Harkness' voice cut back across his thoughts. "I was in the last one, you know. Artillery. Picked up a DSM. I suppose they fixed you boys up pretty well."

"I don't have any medals," Joe said.

"Sure, well, we can't all get 'em. Now, my boy Dick, a captain in the Air Forces, he's got the DFC and a couple of Air Medals."

"Billy," Joe called out to the mate. "Check those outriggers."

Billy Sedges, the mate, clambered up on the cabin to inspect the long bamboo poles with their triggers and lanyards. Mr. Harkness muttered something Joe couldn't catch over the pounding of the engine. "What did you say?" he asked.

"Skip it," Mr. Harkness said. After that Mr. Harkness went back and sat down in a chair on the fantail.

Joe thought back to just how it was when Mr. Harkness came on board that morning. The sun had not been up long when the big green convertible with the Pennsylvania license plate pulled up to the pier. Mr. Harkness was alone. He was a big man just beginning to run to fat and he wore fawn-colored slacks and a handsomely tailored sport jacket. Joe was at the wheel, polishing the little mahogany box that held his compass, when the car came up.

"Nice morning," Mr. Harkness had said.

"Sure is," Joe had replied.

"Any luck?"

"Pretty fair."

"I see you're wearing army coveralls. Just get out?"

"Yeah, not so long ago."

"Got any bookings today?"

"Nope."

"How about taking me out? I always like to do what I can for an army man."

Mr. Harkness' tone had implied that he also liked to do what he could for orphans and stray cats. But what the hell! The man was a customer, and you couldn't turn away money.

The little boat thrust her bow into the light chop. Standing at the wheel Joe could look out over the entire length of the *LazyLou*. He was

very much in love with her. He enjoyed the feel of her under his hands. He liked running his fingers over the smooth firm feel of her in the same way another man would caress a girl.

As he held to his course his mind wandered back to the days when he and Lou Kenicott would talk for hours about the *Jolou*. Lou was a Maine coast boy. He knew the sea and he knew boats. Over and over he would describe to Joe the kind of boat they wanted. He told him what they must look for in the way of hull and engine. He explained to him that age means nothing to a well-built boat but that a good coat of paint may hide rottenness underneath, so that when you go to look at a boat you take your knife and you drive it into her beams and that way you know how sound she is.

When they would stop along the trail to eat their K rations with the endless jungle rain filtering through the leaves over them, Kenicott told him how you keep a dead reckoning track, how you correct for compass variation, how you keep your tackle oiled and free-running, and how you know by the wind and the color of the water whether the fish are feeding.

Joe listened carefully to all of Kenicott's advice. He was fascinated by the clean, exact knowledge contained in the seaman's head. When the heat and loneliness and fear weighed too heavily on his spirit he would wrench his mind away from it to thoughts of the *Jolou*. Shivering at night in the wet mud of his foxhole he dreamed of the little boat dancing over a cool, sparkling sea. He and Kenicott figured up their resources to the last dollar. They knew just how much they would need for the boat, for tackle, and for gas to take them south. With luck Kenicott figured they could clear their investment in one season and from then on anything over their expenses would be gravy.

Well, Kenicott was gone. He lay on a slight rise overlooking a foreign sea, a pale and languid sea that could bring little joy to a spirit that had known the icy surf and fierce winds of the Maine coast. Somehow it hadn't seemed quite right to use the name they had talked about together so many times, so when Joe came back and bought the boat and equipped her the way Kenicott had told him she became the *LazyLou* instead of the *Jolou*.

Joe called to the mate, who was up forward watching for the telltale ripple of school fish, to come and take the wheel. Billy came limping back along the deck. He had been born with a clubfoot that kept him out of service. Joe had seen him hanging around the docks and had

asked him if he wanted a job as mate. It was a good choice, Joe reflected. Billy was kind of a shy sort of kid, but he was clean and hard-working and the bum leg didn't handicap him any in getting around the boat.

With Billy at the wheel Joe went back and got Mr. Harkness ready for fishing. He strapped the harness around him and gave him the good rod with the silver-mounted Jensen reel. He stripped off some line and let the white feather lure run out behind. With Mr. Harkness all set, Joe went back to the wheel and began his slow trolling. He steered in wide circles through the green and purple Gulf Stream waters. Now and then he took his glasses and swept the horizon for some sign of life. But in all that gleaming expanse nothing moved. Even the gulls which had been circling overhead had deserted them.

They fished for an hour and nothing happened. The *LazyLou* crawled slowly over the surface of the sea, but nothing came to their lure. Finally Mr. Harkness laid down his rod with a muttered, "Goddamn, nothing stirring." Joe rigged Mr. Harkness' line through the outrigger that would take up the slack the moment they had a strike.

"I don't understand it," Mr. Harkness said. "I was down this way last year at this time and I brought in three sails in one afternoon's fishing."

"There's still that matter of luck," Joe said.

Mr. Harkness gave him a long look. "I guess you're kind of new at the game, aren't you, Burns?"

Joe didn't answer that one. What answer could you make? He wondered at what point Mr. Harkness had stopped calling him Captain and started calling him Burns. Probably that business about the medals. Well, what was the difference? This Mr. Harkness wouldn't have fished with him again, anyway, if he didn't catch something the first time.

Anyway, he had other things on his mind besides the red-faced Mr. Harkness. There was this business about Helfrichs and the Boatmen's Association. Lou had advised him about a lot of things, but he hadn't ever mentioned a Boatmen's Association.

It had started the morning Joe made his first passage through the inlet. He had pulled up to the big pier. While he was making his lines fast he noticed a big man in a blue yachtsman's cap standing on the pier, watching him.

"Nice boat," the stout man said.

"I like her," Joe said.

"How'd you come down, inland waterway?"

"No, the outside."

"That's O.K. if you don't mind a blow."

"I don't mind it," Joe said.

"Thinking of doing some fishing?"

Joe nodded.

"Well, then, we ought to meet up," the fat man said. "My name is Helfrichs, Carl Helfrichs. I'm president of the Boatmen's Association here."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Helfrichs. I'm Joe Burns."

"We don't get many strangers. Most of our boats been here quite a few years now."

"That so?"

"Yeah; in fact, it's a little crowded right now."

"Seems like there ought to be plenty of room in the ocean."

"That's right, Mr. Burns. There's plenty of room in the ocean but there ain't such a hell of a lot of room on this here pier."

"I don't get you."

"I'm not a hard man to understand. We got all the charter boats here we can use. This pier is run by the St. Margaret Boatmen's Association. We can't take no new members. Now, why don't you keep on south? You'll find more business and more room down there."

Joe reached up and took the boat hook off the port side of the cabin. He held the heavy length of wood idly in his hands and sighted along its length. "Maybe I don't like being told where to go," he said.

"All right," the fat man said. "Just remember this ain't a public pier. This is for members only and you ain't a member. So clear out."

Joe cleared his throat and spat very deliberately at the pier. The saliva lay wet and glistening in the sunshine. The fat man didn't move. Joe stood there a little longer, then he replaced the boat hook, started his engine, and moved slowly away from the pier.

Joe had cruised on down the river until he found an abandoned dock he could rent. Here, alongside this decaying heap, he established himself. He put up a sign, LAZYLOU, READY FOR CHARTER, and waited for business. In the meantime he contented himself with scrubbing, polishing, and varnishing the *LazyLou* until she shone like a jewel. But he soon found that most of the business went to the big pier where the boats of the Boatmen's Association were lined up. Only a few strays, like Mr. Harkness, found their way to his little sign, and these were mostly transients who could not be counted on to return.

The weeks went by and the tension between the *LazyLou* and the other boats grew. Something would have to happen. What could you do? Well, to hell with them!

Joe gave the wheel to Billy again and went back to Mr. Harkness. Mr. Harkness was slouched in his chair, smoking a cigar. Disgust was written all over his face. He was watching a school of porpoise that played around the boat, surfacing in beautiful easy curves, darting under the boat and across the bow and then coming up astern.

"You got a rifle, Burns?" Mr. Harkness asked.

"Yes."

"Let's break it out. I'll see if I can clip one of these fellas."

"What for? They're not doing any harm."

"Hell, there sure isn't anything else doing. We gotta have some sport, don't we?"

"This is a fishing boat, Mr. Harkness. I don't aim to do any shooting off it." How could you explain to Mr. Harkness that Joe Burns didn't want to shoot a porpoise simply for the sake of shooting, that Joe Burns didn't want to shoot anything if he could help it, and that Joe Burns didn't even like the sound of gunfire?

Mr. Harkness threw his cigar butt over the stern. "All right, Burns, let's go back. We're just wasting time here."

"You've still got a couple of hours more fishing if you want it."

"Hell, no. I know when I've made a mistake. Head back."

Joe put the wheel over, gave his throttle three-quarter speed, and headed for the coast. The sun still blazed along the water; the shore was a thin white line ahead.

The wind had died and they made good time going back. They passed through the inlet and on up the river to the little dock. As soon as they touched the pilings Mr. Harkness jumped ashore. Standing on the dock he took four ten-dollar bills out of his wallet and threw the money down onto the chair he had been using. Then he walked over to his car and drove off. Joe watched him go. After the car had disappeared Joe picked up the money and paid Billy.

"Pretty bum sport," Billy said.

"I guess it takes all kinds," Joe said. "How about waiting here with the boat while I go down the road for some oil?"

"Sure," Billy said.

Joe went down to his cabin to get his pipe and tobacco pouch. When he came up Billy was still standing where he had left him.

"Mr. Burns . . ." Billy said.

"Yeah?"

"I wanted to tell you I won't be able to go out with you again."

"What's the matter?"

"Well, there's nothing the matter with the boat, and I sure like working for you, but I think maybe I better not be your mate any more."

"What's on your mind, Billy?"

"It's none of my business, Mr. Burns, but I think maybe you'd be better off if you went some other place."

"Meaning?"

"I mean these other captains. I think they're gonna make trouble for you. I heard them talking about it. They don't want any strangers here."

"Are you scared?"

"No, I'm not. But this is my home town and I've gotta live with these people. You can pick up and leave any time you want, but I've gotta stay here."

"O.K., Billy. You've been a good mate and I'm sorry to lose you, but I guess you're right as far as your side of it goes."

"Do you want me to wait while you go for the oil?"

"Yeah, do that."

After Joe came back Billy left. Joe lit his pipe and sat on the fantail and watched the sun sinking behind the palms. The river was very quiet at this hour of the evening. Once a bird called mournfully, but otherwise there was no sound. A small fish broke water and sent a ring of little ripples across the metallic surface of the St. Margaret. Joe kept thinking how much Lou would have liked sitting there smoking a pipe in the still evening. This was just the way Lou had described it to him back in the jungle.

Joe got up and went below to fix his supper. He opened a can of spaghetti and the tin of fruit he had been saving in the tiny icebox. After supper Joe came back on deck to oil the reel and dry the line Mr. Harkness had been using. He sat there until dark, running his fingers softly over the old silver mountings of the Jensen.

While Joe was sitting there the stars came out. He remembered when Lou Kenicott had first pointed out the Southern Cross as their transport neared the equator. Lou was good on stars the same way he was good on anything that had to do with the sea.

A man was walking along the road. Joe could hear his footsteps in the loose gravel along the side of the road. In a few minutes he saw the

outline of the man against the western sky. He recognized the heavy-set figure as Helfrichs. Joe had a funny little tight feeling in the pit of his stomach. He sat there with the reel in his hand.

Helfrichs walked along the pier to the starboard side of the boat. He put his foot on the gunwale and then stepped down on the deck of the *LazyLou* near where Joe was sitting.

"I see you don't take good advice," Helfrichs said.

Joe didn't say anything.

"Clear out," Helfrichs said. "This is the last time I'm gonna tell you. Clear out before you get hurt."

"Get off my boat," Joe said.

"What?"

"Get off my boat, you fat bastard."

"Why, you lousy punk. If it wasn't that you was a serviceman the boys would of really give you the business long ago."

Joe put the Jensen reel carefully down on deck. He got up out of his chair in a long swinging motion and hit Helfrichs in the face. The fat man staggered back to the side of the cockpit. He growled something in his throat and came back swinging. The first rush put Joe off balance and he nearly fell. Then he got his feet under him and began putting short stiff punches into the fat man's belly. Helfrichs wasn't as soft as he looked. He hit Joe in the mouth and it felt like the kick of a hobnailed boot. Joe was dimly aware of blood running out of his nose and mouth. He kept working away at Helfrichs' belly. He backed the big man up against the gunwale and then, before Helfrichs could recover his balance, Joe drove into him with his shoulder. Helfrichs went over the side and hit the water with a heavy splash. Joe took hold of the boat hook and stood there with it, but it wasn't necessary. The fat man was through. He swam away in the darkness and then Joe heard him struggling ashore through the reeds.

After Helfrichs was gone Joe stood on deck with the blood and sweat running off his face. Later, when his heart had stopped pounding and he had caught his breath, he became aware that he still held the boat hook clenched in his fists. He walked over and hung it up where it belonged.

After that he remembered the Jensen. He got his flashlight and searched along the deck, looking for it. It was right where he had left it. By some good chance it had escaped injury. Joe tied it up in a little chamois bag and put it away with the others.

When he had finished that he went down and turned on the light over the mirror. His face looked bad. His mouth was swollen and bloody and one eye was closing. He got a wet towel and wiped his face. When his face was clean he took off his bloodstained clothing. He walked up on deck naked and jumped over the side.

He must have stayed in the water a long time because when he climbed back on board he was cold and shivering. He went down below and got into clean clothes. Then he took out a new bottle of bourbon and drank off a fourth of it.

With the warmth of the liquor burning all through his body he began to feel better. He went back on deck and wet a swab and carefully removed the heel marks and blood spots left by the fight. When everything was shipshape he went below and lay down on his bunk. He reached up one hand in the darkness and switched on the radio. He tuned in dance music. Then he lay there in his bunk, listening to the music and drinking out of the bottle.

The music was good. It came from a night club in Chicago. Joe enjoyed listening to it. He meant to stay awake. He knew there was a good reason why he ought to stay awake. But in a little while the half-empty bottle slipped out of his hand a ıd he rolled over on the pillow and went to sleep.

Joe was never quite sure what it was that woke him. He had been sleeping soundly, soundly enough so that he didn't hear the soft footstep on the pier or the clink of the five-gallon can. Maybe it was the glare that awoke him or maybe it was the smoke. When he opened his eyes he lay still for a moment, looking at the reflection all around him. Then he jumped out of the bunk and rushed up on deck.

The flame was all over the boat. Even while he fought it furiously with bucket after bucket of water he knew it was too late. Then, when the tanks blew, he stopped fighting and went over the side.

He stood in the shallows and watched her go. Later, when she was down to the water line and there was only a black, smoking hulk alongside the dock, he pulled himself up on shore.

He was only partly aware of the crowds along the beach. Someone took him by the arm and asked him if he was all right. Joe said sure, then he stumbled away and went on down the road.

He walked until he could no longer hear the chatter and gabble behind him and the scream of the fire engine coming through town. He walked until the road came out on the point alongside the inlet.

Joe sat down in the sand and looked at the reef. The moon was up and the surf curled over the reef in a flash of silver and then ran through the inlet. The stars were clear in a cloudless sky. A gentle wind blew from the south. It will be a fine day tomorrow, Joe thought.

Sitting there he was perfectly empty of emotion. Later there would be sorrow and rage and he would be aware of his burned hands and singed hair, but now there was nothing. His mind was quite numb as he gazed out at the reef. He had felt that way once before. It was when they came and told him Lou Kenicott was dead on the beach.

# PIG OF THE SEA

by

Bogart Carlaw

They arrived at Cap Gris Nez in Normandy in the latter part of August, 1939. Though it was so late in a fateful year, these two had no special connection with the great world tragedy that was impending. That is to say, they were not connected in any other way than as two unimportant and already forfeit individuals who carried in themselves some symptoms of the world sickness.

He was a tall young German with wavy blond hair and blue eyes too large, set too wide apart. She was an American, small, with small black eyes. She had a slender, finely made body—indeed, exquisitely made—except for one unfortunate defect. Her left leg was two or three inches shorter than her right leg. As long as she stayed sitting down, she looked very pretty and very graceful. But, especially when there were any people near, she would never stay sitting down. Even on the beach, when people passed, she would not lie still as the German would have wanted her to do. She would get up and limp across, right in front of the staring French people, to look at a pool in the rocks or to pretend interest in some sea shell.

The two of them went in swimming regularly every day. Though it was late in the season, the weather had continued warm. The sea got colder, but not unpleasantly so. They pretended to each other jokingly—as people constantly together will joke, continuing it from day to day—that they were getting ready to swim the English Channel. And because he was, in his own small way, a Nazi—and she a sympathizer, a runaway American who sympathized—their own twist to this joke was that they would swim across in time for the Victory March of German troops on Buckingham Palace. Yes, they spoke thus, though the war had

not yet begun. In clear weather the cliffs of England were visible, mirage-like, white, suspended between the gray sea and the gray sky.

The two of them occupied one small room in the Hôtel de la Mer, a rather dingy building back about a quarter of a mile from the beach. They took all their meals in the hotel dining room, and it was soon remarked by Madame, by Jeanne the maid, and by others that she, the American, paid all the bills. There was a rather battered little portable phonograph on a table in one corner of the dining room and there were some very old, very cracked records. At luncheon or at dinner, after Jeanne had finished serving them and if the room were empty of other hotel boarders, they would often turn on the ancient phonograph and dance between the empty tables. Though they were not married, this was, in a manner of speaking, their honeymoon; they had met only two or three months before in Berlin.

They both painted. He liked to go with his easel to secluded places on the beach and do little landscapes, seascapes, rocks. But she insisted that the only paintable things were in the small village. When peasant women, fishermen, or school children would gather around to watch her painting, she would stand up and limp back and forth in front of them with her eyes on the easel and she would make great sweeping brush strokes, all the while standing up. At such times, if he were by, the German would not know where to look. His cheeks would become pink and his overlarge blue eyes would water.

They did not work much. They spent most of their time together, in their room or on the beach.

One afternoon there was an exceptionally low tide. They had had their swim early in the day; but they strolled down to the beach again about five o'clock when the sea was at its lowest. There were rocks, which they ordinarily did not see at all, sticking high out of the water. Long reefs of sand stretched out to sea, like roadways built through the water, with smaller reefs crisscrossing between. Some of the reefs extended so far that they were lost in the haze.

"We might *walk* to England," she said.

The German laughed, but became serious. He told her a story he had heard of a Spaniard who had ridden far out on horseback over the long sand bars toward the gray receding sea. The Spaniard, a young and solitary and possibly romantic man, may have been activated by some anger, riding out after the sea as it withdrew sullenly from the land. At last the people on shore had seen horse and rider reduced to puppet size.

Then the tide had turned. The waves had come beating in, driven by a strong wind, flooding the flat coast. Those on shore had seen whole stretches of sand disappear as if sucked under. The Spaniard, wheeling his horse around, had started back, leisurely at first, threading his way among the rapidly rising pools of water, several times losing his direction in the intricacies of the sand bars, which everywhere crisscrossed around him and lost shape, parted company, or vanished as the waters rose. At last some sense of his danger must have come to him; and he had begun to gallop. Those on shore had been able to see very clearly how the yellow sand sank into the sea in front of him; and through field glasses they had seen the look on his face and the way he dug his spurs into the horse's sides, and his elbows flopping up and down as he tried to find a way along the sand bars which disappeared one by one in front of him. In the end the tide was too fast for his horse and he was drowned. Perhaps that was what he had first wanted when he rode out in his anger; yet he had struggled to escape.

When the German finished his story, the lame girl was silent a minute, then said: "Well, let's walk out a way, shall we?"

"Not too far," he said.

They got out beyond the rocks about two hundred yards from shore; and then he wanted to turn back. But she insisted that they go farther. She went limping ahead of him; and he had to follow, protesting. They passed the hull of a small ship, just the hull remaining, half sunk in the sand, and covered with clinging shellfish and dripping grayish seaweed. Before she would agree to start back, darkness had fallen. Things looked strange in the darkness and fog. The big revolving lamp in the lighthouse on the point sent a brilliant shaft of light over sea and land. The shaft would be visible coming slowly toward them; then there would be a startling bright flash; and the shaft would disappear, seeming to go more quickly than it had come. And all around them was the drip and suck and lapping, restless sound of water. The tide had turned and was coming in. They had to wade across several places in their shoes and stockings. It was the German who led all the way back; and he kept urging her to greater speed. When they at last reached the shore, they were both wet and perspiring and rather shaken. He said: "You shouldn't take such chances, you know."

Perhaps she thought he was referring to the handicap she was under because of her leg. She snapped: "You were scared! A fine Nazi, you!"

"What nonsense!" he said, looking away from her, his eyes watery.

They were both of them silent and unhappy through dinner and through the rest of the evening.

Two or three days later, they went down to the beach for their afternoon swim. They had on their bathing suits and dressing gowns over them, and he wore sandals, but she had on an old pair of her special shoes over her bare feet. It was difficult for her to walk at all without these shoes, one of which was built up in such a way as to take care of the discrepancy in the length of her legs. They sat down on the beach a few feet from the water, to rest a minute before they went in. It was a chill gray afternoon and the beach was absolutely deserted. Out on the point even the lighthouse looked deserted.

"I must say it's good to be alone this way," he said. "I don't like crowded beaches with everybody looking at everybody else."

"Oh? Why not?" she said.

He did not answer; it was as though he thought that the reason should have been more than obvious to *her*. After a minute she got up and limped over to examine a jellyfish which had been stranded. It was a large one; it must have been a foot or more in diameter. She turned it over with her shoe, disclosing the long blue-white streamers.

"Ugh!" she said. "Disgusting-looking, isn't it?"

He agreed. As she continued to stand over it, staring at it and poking it with her foot, he asked at last: "If you don't like the thing, why don't you leave it alone?"

Without answering, she pushed hard with the built-up heel of her left shoe into the soft jelly substance. The German withdrew his eyes. He lay looking at the sea. After a minute she came back, sat down beside him, and began taking off her dressing gown, preparatory to going into the water. The German still lay looking through half-closed eyes at the sea; but he suddenly saw something that made him open his eyes wide, made him sit up with a jerk and utter a low cry.

She asked, startled: "What is it?"

"Why—I really don't know," he said slowly, "I thought I saw—but I really—don't—know."

Now there was only the sea, very calm, gray. As he kept staring at a certain spot about fifty feet from shore, she followed the direction of his gaze. In a moment they both plainly saw something come up out of the sea; they saw a white glitter of teeth, the shine of the daylight on a black wet hide; then there was only the water again. She jumped to her feet—she was very excited.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, it's some sea monster!"

He was excited, too; but he sat silent, with his mouth slightly parted and his face white, staring at the water. Two or three minutes went past; then they saw it again, this time not more than thirty feet from shore. It rose out of the water, describing a kind of arc, then disappeared. Its body must have been about ten feet long. The stretch of white teeth looked about two feet across.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried. "What is it?"

She was almost jumping up and down in her excitement, her one short leg lifting clear of the ground.

He swallowed with difficulty, made an attempt to answer her in a calm and steady voice:

"I think I know. I've never seen one before. But I think it's a—a *marsouin*—a kind of whale—what the French fishermen call 'a pig of the sea.'"

The big fish came briefly to the surface again about twenty feet farther out. The next time it appeared, it was beyond a rock more than two hundred feet from shore. It stayed in the vicinity of the rock, perhaps ten minutes, diving and coming to the surface again; then they saw it once near the point on which the lighthouse stood. After that they waited over a quarter of an hour, but saw it no more.

She pulled off her shoes suddenly and stood up.

"Shall we go in?"

He laughed rather awkwardly.

"Well, why don't we give the big fellow a chance to get home first?"

"Oh, you're scared," she said instantly.

She was standing with her short leg just touching the ground. He could see that she was trembling and her small, delicately formed face looked strange and tense.

"I'm scared, too," she admitted after a pause, "but that's no reason why we shouldn't go in swimming. If we don't go in today, we won't want to go in tomorrow either. Every day we put it off, it will get harder and harder!"

This was so clearly true. But he said in a low voice: "I don't see any reason why we should force ourselves to do something we don't want to do."

"Oh, you're a regular coward," she said. "We wouldn't ever do anything if we didn't do what we don't like." She was silent a minute, her eyes brooding. Then she said shortly: "I'm going in!"

And she began to run with her curious hopping run into the sea. He cried: "Oh, now, wait a minute!"

But she merely waved her hand wildly and splashed into the water. He sat a minute; then he got slowly to his feet and waded in ankle-deep. She had dived. He waited until her head came up; then he began: "Please——"

"Oh, come on in. The water's fine!" she yelled.

She turned her back on him and began swimming out. He was in a torture of uncertainty. There were small beads of sweat on his forehead; and his eyes, of course, were watery. But, after a minute, he plunged in and swam after her. He was a much better swimmer than she and could very easily have caught up with her and outdistanced her. But he kept about ten feet behind her. Several times he called to her to turn back. She would not listen. Soon she was almost a hundred feet out; and he, just those few feet behind her. The water beneath them was dark, the surface was gray reflected from the gray sky, but the depths beneath were dark. His voice came out strangely loud and peremptory: "Now don't be a fool! I'm not going any farther!"

She mocked him.

"What kind of a Nazi are you? Coward!"

She kept swimming out. For that moment he did not follow her; he stayed where he was, treading water and scowling. Then, however, he started slowly after her again. "God! God!" he was muttering; and the glances he cast at her were glances of sheer hatred. Now she was farther out than they had ever swum before. He yelled at her, as if no longer caring what he said: "God damn you! You've got to stop. Now you've got to turn back!"

"I'm sailing against England," she called airily.

The German could imagine things beneath him in the water. When he looked down, he would see the white glimmer of his legs or he would see what he fancied was a black shadow, standing out blacker than the rest. Even though he did not look down, there was all his body which could feel things, sudden chilling currents of colder water, the slimy entangling touch of floating seaweed.

"She's as scared as I am," he muttered with loathing, "scared as I am! Yet she keeps on swimming out!"

At last they were a full three hundred feet from shore. They were out almost as far as the point on which the lighthouse stood. And here was a sweep of water which carried them northward, away from the light-

house, away from the shore. With sudden desperate resolution, the German ground his teeth together and swam toward her at his greatest speed, as if he would force her to turn back—as if he would kick her, hit her, choke her, if necessary.

He quickly shortened the distance between them. He was almost within reach of her bobbing head, when she suddenly screamed—a scream that sounded small but terrible in the gray vastness around them. Her body seemed to rise up, one instant, out of the water; and as it did so, it turned convulsively in mid-air. He saw her face, so close to his, horribly distorted.

Absolute terror seized him. He made sounds—perfectly unconscious, whimpering sounds—with his mouth. His arms and legs beat wildly. With every atom of force in him, he was striving to flee, to drive his body in flight through the resisting cold water; but for a minute he could not even get himself turned around. And then he almost sank. He heard her scream again twice, strangled screams, screams not articulate at all but which were most desperate pleading cries for help. Then he heard nothing except the clumsy splashing sounds of his own progress—his unbelievably slow progress through the water.

It was not until he had dragged himself exhausted upon the shore that he so much as looked back.

The sea was now perfectly gray and empty. The black spot of her head was nowhere visible upon it. Yet it must have been a long minute before the German realized that she was actually gone, actually dead. His American mistress was dead. He slowly circled his lips with his tongue. He looked all around him and up and down the beach. But there was no one anywhere. With a great exaggeration of effort he pulled himself to his feet. Then he looked once more all around him and up and down the beach. He looked once more, too, at the empty gray sea. He began to pace. He paced back and forth, back and forth, in a kind of strange embarrassment, feeling a kind of resentment.

Finally he put on his dressing gown and sandals and started slowly back to the hotel. He was halfway there, when it occurred to him that it would have been better to act like one distraught. He hesitated, then began to run and was quite breathless by the time he reached the hotel.

He very soon had a large and interested audience. His story was that she had been devoured by some big fish; this was, of course, what he really thought had happened. He even said that he had seen the fish; he had seen it rise out of the water beside her head and he had himself

been attacked by the same fish. It had been so close under him that he had kicked at it with his foot and he had escaped only by a miracle. When he suggested, however, that the fish had been a *marsouin,* the people of the village shook their heads. They stated that the *cochons de mer,* the pigs of the sea, would never do harm to human beings; they got themselves tangled up in the fishermen's nets and tore and ruined them, but they would not attack a human being. The villagers said that it might have been a shark. And the German, reflecting some more, agreed that it had probably been a shark.

That afternoon several boats set out to look for the body; but the search was not pushed far, since, if the American girl had indeed fallen victim to a shark, there would not be much body left to look for. The German wanted to leave Cap Gris Nez immediately. He had Madame of the hotel telephone to Boulogne for a car to come and get him. Then he spent all afternoon in his room, packing. He knew that the American girl had a father at a certain address in the United States; and so he composed a cable to be transmitted, signing to it simply the name of the hotel. He had decided to leave all the girl's effects in charge of Madame of the hotel, so that the father could send for them there, if he wanted to; but, after a slight hesitation, he pocketed the money she had left in her pocketbook.

The automobile arrived about five o'clock; and the German, who was all packed and in a great hurry to leave, had Jeanne carry his luggage down, while he hunted up Madame to pay the bill. He was in the dining room, settling the bill, when there was a commotion outside; and some fishermen came in, carrying the body. The body had been found floating near shore among a whole school of jellyfish. There were no marks of teeth on the body, the men said. Perhaps drowning had been caused by a cramp; or perhaps this poor little American girl, feeling the jellyfish around her in the water, had become so frightened as to forget how to swim.

When the men said this, the German thought that, though they were indeed decorously solemn, they were laughing at him. He became pinker than he had ever been in his life before; and his eyes watered so much that he had to take out his handkerchief and dab at them furtively. It did not even occur to him that this might be considered only a natural expression of grief. He became so choked with embarrassment that he could hardly speak. Stammering out something about calling a priest, he hurried out of the hotel and through the crowd that had gathered, jumped into the car, and was driven rapidly off.

# THE WAY THINGS ARE

by

Sam Elkin

From the first day on after Henry Bruck came home he ran into everyone, it seemed, he had ever known and many he did not know. There had been a lot of things about him in the paper, and he had already received a call from Ed Thompson, the managing editor, telling him his old job was waiting. But that he was thinking about. He didn't want to see Ed Thompson just yet. He wanted to think about that for a while. There was plenty of time to reason things out now.

He did a great deal of walking. The doctor in the hospital told him he would have to learn to use his right leg all over again. Walking would fill it out again. Strengthen the muscles and bones and keep the blood circulating normally. But he found out that with walking came a lot of talking because so many people seemed to know him or know of him. And so many people asked questions he could not answer. And it seemed ridiculous that he could not answer them when they asked: "What was the toughest fight you were in?"

He stood looking at them, knowing they expected him to say Kasserine Pass, or Salerno, or Cassino, where it had finally happened. He knew they expected him to name places they had read about in the papers. But how could he tell them that he disliked saying those places? How could he tell them that when he said: "They were all pretty tough," what he really wanted to say was: "The toughest fight I was in was always the one I had with myself."

"Yourself?" they would probably say in that amazed, questioning way.

Then what could he say? I was afraid? I was always so scared I wanted to run? But how could you even say that without sounding like some damned hero?

During these conversations someone invariably asked: "How did it feel getting hit?"

"I don't really know," he said.

"You don't know?" they said. They smiled. "You mean you caught some steel and you don't know what it felt like?"

He looked at them.

"Didn't it hurt?"

"Yes."

They shook their heads.

"Afterwards," he said. "That is when the pain came back again in the hospital."

"Oh. I see what you mean," they said. "I guess it's like breaking a leg or an arm. You feel the pain after it happens. Say, there's a cousin of mine . . ."

"That's it," he said quickly. "Look. I just remembered. I've got an appointment at the paper. They're waiting for me. I'm sorry. See you again. Good-by. Good-by. Good-by." And he left them in the street, they, no doubt, wondering if he was all there and he wondering why the words to say his feelings were so cluttered, why it seemed clear running through his head and why, when he tried to explain how it was, it came out and sounded ridiculously stupid.

It wasn't that he didn't want to tell them, either. Because sometimes in remembering the things that had happened he wasn't at all too sure they had happened that way. During the long tiresome months in hospitals he tried writing about it, but he never could seem to get started. He would think too much about *how* to write it down instead of letting it come out by itself. Talking about it with others in the hospital wasn't much good, either. Everybody joked about how it happened to them, which was the best thing. But once in a while you got serious and talked about it, and then too many lies crept in and you got disgusted lying about it. It got so easy to lie about it. You didn't mean to, but you did. And after a while you got so you couldn't remember what was truth and what wasn't any more. Only when you kept it inside did it seem to make sense. If it were possible, somehow, to transcribe thoughts and feelings on a record, maybe then he could make them understand what it felt like getting chunks of steel in your leg, what it felt like being in

battle, in war, and in the army. Maybe then he could make them understand why, if it was supposed to happen to you, you wanted it to happen clean and be done with. Maybe they could be made to feel the waiting. It wasn't all fighting. You waited around a lot and this was one of the bad things. But the worst thing of all was the uncertainty. Jesus, if he could only make them understand about the uncertainty, and then about the filth and the slop and the mud that sucked the blood out of you, and how cold you always were and the smell of your stinking body, inside and out, when sometimes you'd feel your skin falling off from sores and you'd scratch them until the sores would bleed and then the blood would dry and crust all over your body. And what about when you thought of all the things you wanted and all the things that used to be and whenever you talked of these things with someone you always ended up feeling lousy and empty and sad and lost?

Then when you began to think about your wife. Jesus, God, how that ripped the guts out of you, the loneliness, the rotten terrible loneliness beginning to come again and Jesus if you could only see her you'd get rid of this stinking loneliness and feel clean again. The ugliness of yourself because of the loneliness would loosen inside you. Make you feel like a man again instead of something rotten fighting to live.

Yes, a record of your thoughts and feelings and then, maybe, they'd understand that in time it all passed away into the waiting. Because when you waited long enough the waiting began to play tricks on your mind and Goddamnit! why the hell didn't they *do* something, *anything!* but do *something!* But when that something finally came you didn't want it. You got scared, so scared and sick you couldn't eat a thing. You began to wish for a broken leg or a broken arm so that they'd send you back. But nothing like that happened. You went in, a baby, talking yourself into feeling you didn't give a good Goddamn until things began to happen and then you became very careful and it became terribly important that you go on breathing, especially when all the fire seemed to be centered on you alone.

Then you began to pray. You lay flat on your belly, sweating and praying, O dear God, I promise to be good. I promise to do Your bidding. I promise to pay my debts. I promise to stay away from the whores. I promise this. I promise that. Only, please God, please, dear dear God. This way you prayed your guts out and when it was over and you came out all right you didn't tell the whore in Naples who had been laying for the Germans the week before about God. You didn't tell anybody else

about God, either. Not even yourself. That is, until the next time when you worried whether God would do something to you for lying the first time.

And then, just like that, you didn't care about God. You didn't care about the mud and the slop and the whole Goddamned vile stinking mess. All of a sudden all you cared about was that sonofabitch in front of you, that sonofabitch you shot not for the preservation of freedom, not for the home, or the family, or the Four Freedoms, or the Declaration of Independence, that sonofabitch you shot and killed, and killed again and again, because all of a sudden you had it figured out that as long as you went on killing first you were able to stay alive. It was as simple as that. Because after you *really* had that figured out for yourself it became a little difficult to keep you from killing. After you found out who and what you were fighting you shot and killed them anywhere, anytime, and anyhow you saw them. Especially snipers. Like the one who came to you with his hands up, emphasizing he had no gun. He had been hiding in a house in a narrow alley, slugging everybody who tried to go down that alley. Then when he ran out of ammunition he came down into the street, smiling, speaking English, insisting he be treated as a prisoner of war under the rules of the Geneva Convention. You remembered him smiling and speaking and even as he spoke of Geneva Convention you shot him full in the face and you remembered that sudden surprised, then frightened, then blank look of his. The C.O. saw you do it, too. But he was a good guy. He didn't say much. Don't let anybody from headquarters see you do that. That was all he said. But you didn't care who saw you do it. You just didn't care, that's all. Maybe that's why no chickenshit boy ever saw you. Or the others. Because you did the same thing as many times as you found them. And they deserved nothing better. And then how many times you lied to God didn't matter. The rifle in your hand mattered. The clips in your rifle and rifle belt mattered. Your helmet mattered. A canteen of water mattered. The tinned food mattered. That little shovel to dig foxholes mattered a great deal. That is, until some 88's began shelling the road you were going down and suddenly a great wind tore into you and smacked you down. And in that very instant when you knew you had been hit everything that mattered in killing didn't matter any more. The word God came to you then but it had very little meaning and the only true meaning that made you fight to live was the frantic pulling memory of reddish blonde hair and violet-colored eyes and softness, softness you wanted and needed

so terribly at that moment that the effort to drag your shattered right leg fifty yards or more up the road was nothing.

Then when you lay behind a mound of earth you wouldn't look down at your leg. You took all twelve sulfanilamide tablets with one gulp of water. And you lay back, the blood pounding all over you. Jesus, how you wanted to look down there, but you were afraid. The stinking grimy sweat just poured out of you and finally you worked up enough courage to look down there. The leg was there but it didn't look like much. The foot was lying flat on its right side. You leaned over to pick it up but some medics came and pushed you back. You asked them how bad it was. They didn't answer. They gave you morphine right away and suddenly you knew the war was over. And you began to cry. You were glad and you were crying because you knew the war was over. You were crying and glad and how the hell can you tell anybody about things like that? How can you make them understand with words? Maybe with thoughts on a record. No, no. Not even then. You can't tell them anything. You can't make them understand anything. Because to really know about war you've got to be in it from the beginning. You've got to start from way back when you first got into the army, long before war began. You've got to become part of the terrible drudgery of army life. You've got to feel the painful sense of fleeting time, when time becomes such a precious thing that when you go on a pass, even a furlough, you're already thinking about the day you'll return. Then, during that pass or furlough, you try to taste everything, do everything, and there simply isn't enough time. No matter how much you see, do, hear, eat, love, it hasn't been enough. To know about war, to which battle and army belongs, you've got to become ingrained into the faces, the expressions, the eyes, the hopes, fears, joys, sadnesses, of the men with you, who live with you and become closer to you than your own father. You've got to be with them during the fraternity period before war and be alive to all the horseplay and all the bitching and all the wisecracks and then feel it change suddenly. Then you've got to become part of the beginning fear and the realization that the game period is over. Then you've got to go into the training and the day-after-day grind, into the talks and the bull sessions when a man begins to tell what's inside him, how he thinks and feels about the things he's hoping will come out of the war. And then you've got to go into battle. You've got to see your friends get killed off. Not quickly. And not completely at first. But slowly, in a hundred different ways. And then you've got to understand that their dying is your

dying. And then you've got to see them dead, actually and finally and completely. Then you'll know about war and try to tell these things to others who know nothing more about it than what they read in the papers, or see in the movies, or hear over the radio. Because even though you want to tell them when you meet them in the street, after a while their questions begin to pound in you like a hammer and you can't hang on to their words. You keep drifting away. You see the faces of men you've known peering over their shoulders. Some of these faces grin. Some are twisted. Some just look at you. So, after a while, when the people you meet in the street ask you how it had been, you answer: "It was like a great big bastard. Like a great big dirty dirty bastard." You watch the embarrassment that creeps into their eyes. Then you turn and limp away and this happens so many times that they stop asking you questions and you begin to feel better after that.

They decided, then, that Henry Bruck was bitter. And they decided he should not be that way. They remembered that long before war, when he had just entered the army, he had written stories for the newspaper. And they remembered that his stories had always been trim and tight. Unspouting. They remembered the things he had said about the training for war. They remembered there had been very little humor in what he wrote. They said of him then that he was too serious. Couldn't he see the funny side of it all? Others were doing so. Did he have to make it sound as though America would be in war the very next day?

Where he lived they began to discuss him as they would a new tenant in the neighborhood. They did not speak to him any more, but they watched as he passed by in the street, limping along with a cane in his right hand, a thin young man with deep lines running across his forehead and around the corners of his lips and eyes.

The way they saw him now was not the way they remembered him. They saw him now, still a young man, but with something older, something quieter, something buried in his face and eyes. It would be easy for them to say that the war had done it and let it go that way. But *what* of the war had done that to him? This they did not know. They only knew that he had changed from a boy running and playing baseball in the summer and football in the autumn and basketball in the winter into a man they could not speak to.

Henry Bruck they now watched silently. But his wife, when she came into the grocery store or the butcher store, they spoke to her of him.

"How is Hank feeling today?" they asked.

Ruth, who knew why they asked and deeply resented their asking, answered plainly and pointedly: "He's fine. He's never felt better in his life." She spoke so slowly saying that, her tone carrying such deep conviction, that they did not ask her any further questions. And soon they asked her nothing at all because they eventually came around to saying amongst themselves that she, too, had become bitter and that she should not be that way, either, because she was not the only one who had had a husband badly injured in the war. Some of them had husbands and most of them had sons in the army, too. And, though it might be true that their husbands and sons had not been in battle yet, there were wives and mothers all over the country whose husbands and sons were and are fighting. Some had been injured, too. Some had not come back. Some would never come back, either. At least her husband was home and now he was out of the army and he would never fight again and, though he would never walk as well as before, he was *alive* and *able* to walk and talk and eat and sleep, and besides she would see him every day now, not as before it was true, but she would have him near her, and after all that was the important thing, wasn't it?

Henry Bruck was feeling his way slowly, trying to get the inside of himself into the feeling of being home. Long before he had gone into the army, and even afterwards, in the hospital, when he had talked with others about returning into civilian life, everyone had agreed that the change could be done like a snap of the fingers. It would be no trouble at all, they used to say. Just give me the chance. That's all I ask.

Now he wasn't too sure. Mostly there were small things. Like talking with people in the street. Like his wife telling him one day about Mr. Jameson, who had died only a short three weeks before he came home. He had shown no surprise, no concern, and it was so noticeable that Ruth thought he had not heard.

"Mr. Jameson, Hank," she repeated. "You remember him."

"Sure," Hank said.

"Hank?"

"Yes?"

She paused. "I don't know," she said.

Hank spoke slowly. "What are you talking about, Ruth?"

"I don't know, Hank."

He saw the hurt in her eyes and he realized what she must be thinking

and he laughed and told her not to be silly. But that didn't change his feelings. Mr. Jameson's death didn't bother him. There was a time when it would because Mr. Jameson had been a friend. But now Mr. Jameson's death seemed like nothing at all. Mr. Jameson had died quietly.

Three weeks after he was home Ruth threw a surprise party for his return. A few close relatives were invited and Ruth's mother and father were to fix up the apartment while Ruth and Hank were to spend the day in New York.

It was a Sunday morning and they went into the city early. Before lunch they strolled around Rockefeller Plaza. They stopped at the rink and watched the skaters below for a while. Later they ate in Longchamps on Fortieth and Seventh Avenue. After lunch they decided to go to the Museum of Modern Art up in the Fifties.

It was a cold day. The sun was weak. The sky was clear. From Longchamps they walked up to Fifth Avenue, turned left toward Fifty-third Street. Fifth Avenue was wind-swept and clean. Everything looked smart and clean. The women were beautifully dressed. Watching them strut along made Hank feel better than he had felt in a long time. It was pretty much the way he had pictured it along Fifth Avenue on a clear cold sunny winter's day.

He held Ruth's arm close to him. Every now and then he would look at her and smile. And shake his head from side to side.

"You don't have to take a back seat to any of them," he'd say. Or: "You're beautiful, Ruth. Beautiful."

Hank could feel himself unfolding as they walked. And stopped to look in the store windows. And walked on again. He liked the feeling of stopping and looking in the store windows, particularly the women's stores, and commenting on some clothes and how they would look on his wife.

"There's something, Ruth. Why don't you buy it? . . . Now how about *that?* . . . Match your eyes . . . your hair . . . your nose. . . . Buy a dozen of these, Ruth . . . two dozen. . . . To hell with the dough."

Henry Bruck was breathing more deeply. Coming alive again. It was good. It was very, very good.

At the museum Hank liked the paintings. He had never bothered much with paintings before but he found them interesting. He liked the

atmosphere. He liked, also, the way people strolled casually through the winding halls, talking softly, pausing, staring, and moving on again.

After the museum they decided to go to Lindy's. There the crowd and the noise and the coming into the warmth out of the cold stretched the feeling he had had walking on Fifth Avenue. He ws very hungry, too.

"Blintzes with sour cream, that's what I want," Hank said to the waiter. "Also some cheesecake and milk."

"Anything else?" Ruth said.

"Matjes herring and onions."

Ruth started to laugh. "Oh, no, Hank. Please."

"You order some, too."

"I couldn't."

"I'll order it for you."

He did, and both of them had matjes herring and onions. After they finished they began blowing in each other's face and Hank said to hell with the people we'll sit next to in the theater.

But after Lindy's, and just before he bought tickets for a musical, Ruth said she didn't feel too well and Hank said it was her imagination. It certainly couldn't be the onions. But Ruth insisted that they go home and when Hank looked at her he had to laugh and Ruth did a good job of blushing. Besides, Hank was beginning to feel tired.

It was dark when they got home. Ruth rang the bell to their apartment three times and Hank asked her what she was doing that for. Ruth said no reason, she just felt like doing it.

"You got a fever or something?"

"Don't be silly, Hank. I feel fine."

"Oh, you're all right now?"

"Just a little headache, that's all."

They both laughed as they walked up the two flights of stairs. Hank opened the door to the apartment and turned the hall light switch on immediately. He went into the bedroom, which was just off the hallway.

He switched the light on.

Ruth took off her coat and helped Hank off with his. Ruth said: "Let's go into the living room."

Hank limped ahead to the living room.

The light was still on in the hallway and you could see the glare fade away into the living room. He passed the darkened kitchen and was only

a couple of steps away from the archway that led into the living room. Ruth was right behind him.

Hank stopped. A cold sweat began to ooze out of his body. His eyes widened. He began to tremble. Somebody was in the living room. He could *feel* it. He heard Ruth say: "Go on, darling." And the casual way she said it made him want to scream. He heard her laugh and saw her move around him and he wanted to reach out. To pull her back. But he couldn't move.

Ruth switched on the light in the living room and many voices chorused: "Surprise! Surprise!" Instantly, Hank realized what it was and, fortunately, Ruth was hiding him from the half-dozen people in the room. No one saw his face. Nor his eyes. The scream that had raced up his throat stopped on his tongue. Suddenly he felt so weak he had to sit down. He laughed a little and wiped the sweat off his forehead with his hand. Then he began saying hello to everybody.

That night the dreams came back again. Foreboding dreams. There was always darkness and silence. An ugly silence in which he could hear himself thinking. One sentence he could hear over and over again, like a main theme in a symphony: *When the war is over bad dream if I'm still alive. When the war is over bad dream if I'm still alive.* Then as the sentence faded into background he could see an 88-millimeter shell floating toward him. Hanging from the shell were bits of clothes. A few fingers. A shoe with a foot in it. Then the shell exploded. But there was no detonation. It was as though he were watching a talking picture that had lost its sound.

The first night he awoke with a start and lay staring up at the darkened ceiling. He could hear Ruth's breathing beside him. He got up and smoked a cigarette. He went into the bathroom, urinated, tossed the cigarette in the bowl, and flushed the toilet. Then he went back to bed again, and fell asleep.

The second night he jerked up to a sitting position in bed. "The lights! Get some lights! Jesus Christ Almighty! Put on the Goddamned lights!"

Ruth awoke out of a deep sleep, terrified, quickly realized her terror, and rushed to snap on the lights. She saw Hank sitting up in bed, his hands clutching the covers, his eyes wide and frightened.

Ruth had gone pale and tears quivered in her eyes. She took Hank in her arms as she would a baby.

After he had quieted down and stopped trembling, Hank lit a ciga-

rette. He said nothing and Ruth didn't ask him anything. When he finished the cigarette Ruth said: "Shall I leave the light on?"

"No. Turn it off."

Ruth did and got back into bed. Hank put his arms around her and drew her close. This way he fell asleep.

The same dream lasted for a week. But there was no more screaming out. Finally, the dream went away altogether.

One afternoon, while he was out walking, Hank met two friends who were in uniform. One had been overseas in a rear area and had been sent back to the States to attend Officer Candidate School. He was home on overseas furlough. The other hadn't been overseas at all. As they talked, about nothing of consequence, Hank noticed how quick and sure they were. He found himself envying their ease. They spoke for a time, and then the one who hadn't been overseas said something about how disgusted he was just sitting around and how he'd like to get into some action.

Hank made some excuse then and left.

There was a little bar near where Hank lived. Before the war he used to go in for a beer now and then. He never got to know the owner very well, but it was a quiet little place, and as he passed it one evening going home he decided to drop in for a moment.

Inside he met a soldier at the bar who had been at Cassino. The soldier was still in uniform. He was going to be discharged. He had one leg and was still under treatment.

For a while Hank felt good at being able to talk to someone. They spoke of the army and how much they both hated it and how glad he, Hank, was to be out. They spoke of the things that had happened to them before they went into battle, of their outfits, and then, inevitably, the talk turned to the battles they had fought.

They both began to lie about the battles and both of them knew they were lying and Hank tried to stop lying about the way things happened but he found that one story led to another. The same was true for the soldier, particularly when they got around to their injuries.

Finally, Hank said he had to go. The soldier, whose name was Pete, said they ought to meet again sometime. Hank said that would be fine with him. Then he left and both of them knew they would never see each other again.

"I can't explain it," Hank said.

Ruth, sitting beside him on the couch, looked down at her hands in her lap. Now, she thought. This is the time. I must do it now.

"I don't want to antagonize anybody," Hank said. "It's just that I can't stand their questions."

"Forgive me, Hank. But you *have* changed."

He turned to his wife and shook his head. "That's a silly thing to say. Of course I've changed. Who hasn't? Is anybody expected not to change in a war?"

"I don't mean that, Hank."

Well, what *do* you mean? he thought. Irritation touched him. For a number of days he had felt himself turning inside himself again. And he hadn't wanted that to happen. He knew that wasn't fair to Ruth, to himself, to anyone. He knew it made him feel depressed and angry at himself, and feeling so, he knew that small irritations became gigantic and unreasonable. He moved his body back against the arm of the couch, pulling his left leg up on the cushions. Now he was facing his wife.

"What I mean is this," Ruth said. She reached beside her and pulled some sheets of folded paper out of an old, withered envelope.

"One of those love letters I wrote you for publication?" Hank said.

Ruth could not help smiling at that and Hank laughed and then they both laughed for a moment. Then she said: "This is a letter you wrote me just before you went overseas." She glanced through the writing quickly, then: "I'll read the part that's pertinent."

Hank looked at his wife. Some of the letter-writing nights drifted into his memory. He recalled again the feeling of rotten inadequacy. Sometimes the writing relieved him. But mostly it was miserable and aching, like a three-minute telephone call when the operator cuts in and you haven't any more money and you've spent the three minutes trying to think of things to say. How he hated the letter writing, the waiting for letters, but more than anything the writing of letters. How often, as he wrote, he built the scenes in his mind of her receiving the letter and how she would look and when she would read it and where, and how it would touch her. And, sometimes, when he felt very low he knew it would come out in the letter and he knew his depression would carry over into her, and thinking of it that way made him feel empty and useless and, worst of all, trapped.

That was the feeling, too. You couldn't help feeling it, no matter how much you believed in the war or the things you hoped would come out

of the war. You got to hate the loneliness so much that some of the hatred flowed over into the things you said and thought and wrote and felt, and the only thing you had left was hope—hoping for the end of the war, hoping to go home, hoping to get away from the brutal stupidity of the army. . . .

Hank shook his head slowly from side to side as he gazed through his wife. Ruth saw him shaking his head. She said: "Don't you want me to read it, Hank?"

"No, no. Go on. I was just thinking."

"What, Hank?"

For a moment he was silent. Then: "Nothing."

"Please, Hank."

"It really wasn't anything."

"Sometimes you make me feel so unnecessary."

There was a note of sadness rather than anger or bitterness in her voice. It swept into him like a sudden stab of pain.

"God, no, Ruth. Don't say a thing like that."

"Perhaps you don't mean it, Hank. But that's how you make me feel."

He was silent, shaking his head slowly, his eyes on Ruth's face. And now he saw a stern, determined light enter her eyes. And now it seemed to spread down her face, extending her nostrils slightly and straightening her lip line and broadening her jaw. He watched her draw back against the arm of the couch and there was something about the way she did it that he didn't like.

"Now, Ruth," he said. "You know better . . ." He paused as he saw the coldness in her eyes. "What's wrong, Ruth?"

She did not answer. He smiled in confusion.

"One of the reasons I fell in love with you," she said, "was because of the strong belief you had in people."

Hank began to smile, but stopped as he saw how serious she was. "You're being very silly," he said.

"Am I? Do you deny you've lost your faith, your belief, your feelings about people?"

Hank sat back straight. "Are you serious?" he said.

"Hank, I don't know about you any more."

For the first time a flush came into his cheeks. "Stop talking like a child," he said.

"Hank, you shy away from people. You don't want to talk to them. Sometimes I feel you resent them."

His tone was sarcastic as he said: "Why don't you read all the experts on how to treat the returning soldier?"

"Just a few minutes ago you said you couldn't stand the questions people ask."

"Well, I can't."

"Is it because they won't understand?"

"Well, they won't."

"Is it necessary?"

Hank did not answer. The twinge of ugly irritation was turning into anger because of the cross-examination. He decided not to say anything at all. But Ruth dug swiftly into his silence: "Is it necessary for people to understand what you went through before you'll treat them like people? Or"—and her voice became heavily sarcastic—"do you also believe that America should have been bombed so that . . ."

"Goddamnit, what the hell's the matter with you?"

Ruth's eyes were slightly red.

"You make me sound like some Goddamn kid!"

Ruth said nothing.

"I didn't go to war for the excitement, understand?" Hank's face was red and he had moved his body so that both his feet were on the floor and his head was turned to Ruth. "Look, little girl, I wasn't on any Goddamn joyride! Get that straight! Damn, I never expected you to say things like that!"

Ruth was silent.

"Now look," he said, "I hated the war and more than that I hated the army. And more than both of them I hated the loneliness. Why, Goddamn it, anybody can fight a war if he comes home at night to his wife!"

Ruth's eyes were fixed on Hank's face. Her lower lip was curled under her teeth. She seemed to be biting her lip.

"I don't mind when people ask me about the killing," he said. "Or being killed. Or hurt. You grow indifferent to the killing. As for being killed—well, if it happens it happens and that's all there is to it. You don't know about it anyhow." Hank stood up suddenly and took a step away from the couch and turned around. He looked down at Ruth. He spoke with slow bitterness in his voice: "Only once in a while you get to thinking that you're too young to die, and that you don't want to be hurt, and when you see the older officers, the big-shot planners, you ask yourself what right has he got to tell me to go out and get myself killed. He's lived. I haven't. His death means nothing compared to mine." He

paused and shook his head. "But that's not even the worst of it," he continued in a slow, bitter tone, clenching his fists in anger. "It's the dragging on of the whole vile mess. The rotten miserable stinking loneliness that colors everything you ever hoped for or ever thought about. I can't tell people about that!" He leaned over from the waist, glaring down at Ruth. "Do *you* understand that?"

Ruth said very quietly: "The loneliness, yes."

Her answer caught him with his mouth open. He straightened up and brought his lips slowly together. But as she watched the anger begin to seep out of his face and eyes she also saw, with sinking heart, the sudden tightening around the corners of his lips and she lowered her head on her chest, her eyes on the letter in her lap. She heard Hank turn and then she heard him putting on his coat and walk to the umbrella rack in the hall for his cane. She did not look up, even when she heard the door slam. She sat for a long time with her eyes on the letter in her lap. Her eyes were red and her lips were pulled slightly together. And after a while she put the letter lying in her lap back in the envelope.

Oratanum hadn't changed much. You walked down the Main Street of stores that lined both sides of the narrow street like houses of prostitution. There were no ugly gashes in the building structure. No rubble lay piled up in the streets. There was the atmosphere of living in the stores and buildings. Normal living, though somewhat accelerated and tedious as far as Hank was concerned. Many years ago he had worked in some of the stores as a salesman or a stock clerk, and both jobs, or any job in a store, had always struck him as foul, boring work.

Some stores had grown larger since he last remembered them. They seemed bloated with prosperity. Their windows were full of assorted items he hadn't seen in many months.

Main Street, at night, lived in a blaze of glory. But in the daytime, like most towns, it was a drab and shoddy street. And as he walked along it he paused many times to look into the windows to admire the men's suits, the sweaters, the brightly colored shirts and ties, the assortment of hats and overcoats and shoes.

Some faces of the people passing by were familiar to him. He didn't know them by name, but he nodded or said hello and passed on. He did not stop anyone, and none stopped him to talk.

He got as far as the Oratanum Library and began to feel tired. On the corner of the street, in front of the thorn bushes which surrounded the

library, were three or four cement benches with wooden seats and backs for people waiting for busses. An old woman sat on one bench with some bundles in her hands. Hank went over to the first bench nearest the corner and sat down. He glanced around at the old, dark, brownstone, vine-smothered library and thought about going in to see Miss Sarah Freedom. He wondered if she had changed much. He smiled, thinking about her . . . remembering the many hours he had spent in the library, the writing he had done there in the dead, stale quiet of the library silence. He remembered walking between the aisles of books and looking at the names of the writers, and taking the books in his hands, and glancing through the pages at the neatly typed words and feeling a strange kind of sadness at seeing so many words and knowing and understanding how much the writer must have felt in the writing, and then, sighing, he'd put the books back on their shelves and stand back and gaze, a little forlornly, at the row upon row of books. . . . God, it was a feeling he hadn't had in so very long. And now he thought it would be good just to have that feeling once again, to go into the library and talk to Miss Sarah Freedom.

He turned back to the street again, his gaze running up Tandem Street, which crossed Main. From where he sat he could just about see the editorial entrance of the *Oratanum Daily*. He would go up there first and then to the library. Right now he would sit here and rest.

He reached into his pocket for a cigarette, took one out and lit it. Over to his right, up the main street, he could see the marquee of the Oratanum Theater. On the marquee, in large white letters, were the words: LONDON RAID.

He turned his eyes to the street again. What had happened to Ruth? He had never expected such talk from her. He shook his head and sighed. Maybe he'd been a bit too rough. No. Maybe she needed it. What kind of nonsense was that? Did he believe America should have been bombed? That kind of talk from soldiers had always made him laugh. When soldiers said it to him he used to tell them that maybe those bombs would fall on their own homes, their fathers, or mothers, or wives. And then they used to say, well, don't let it fall on anyone. Just out in the fields somewhere, to let people know what falling bombs sound like. He took a deep puff on the cigarette. That was all right from them, but not from Ruth.

He watched the people walking calmly through the streets. He saw a young couple strolling toward the theater and he saw the boy look up

at the marquee, then turn and say something to the girl. She shook her head, and they stopped a moment, then the boy pulled her by the arm and they continued toward the theater.

What had made Ruth say what she did? It was true that he hadn't been too chummy with other people. But, God, if anybody should understand Ruth should. He shook his head suddenly. Something was screwy. He hadn't noticed her sarcasm until after she said sometimes you make me feel so unnecessary. And when she did say that it seemed to be spoken sadly rather than angrily. He remembered that note of sadness quite plainly. It had made him feel like a heel. But right after that she seemed to come at him with curled fingers. He shook his head again. Do you believe America should have been bombed . . .

Hank's gaze moved up the street again to the Oratanum Theater, on the marquee, on the white letters, on the dark-brown background: LONDON RAID; and this time, as he turned his head away, he heard the screaming siren circling the tangled web of city like a great cry of defense. And even before the siren died away the sound of guns off in the distance somewhere began to urge the people in the streets to move quickly, then to run for the nearest shelter.

God, how rotten and unclean that siren made you feel! He remembered standing in the streets of London, in trembling darkness of the blackout, watching the sudden flashes in the night, hearing the dull thuddings of bombs exploding somewhere in the city. In the beginning he would stand out in the street, but later he went down into the Underground, deep into the earth, as did many others, and only the stupid ones, or the unfortunates, stayed out in the open.

It was there in London he learned to be afraid. In combat you at least had a gun in your hands. It wasn't much against an 88 or a machine gun, but the sound of your gun in your ear made you feel a little better. But in London there was nothing. And you couldn't see anything, either. And then you didn't know when it might come for you. Or when the building you were in would crumble down on your head. You just had to wait and sweat. And when it was over you felt all right. And the next morning you walked through the streets and it was no different, except for the rubble, than it would be right here. Now. Like these people, calmly walking through the streets. The mother and her two children. The three cute girls passing by from school, laughing, giggling. And there, across the street, an old woman looking up and down the road for automobiles. Now two men talking earnestly passing by. And the old

woman on the bench with her packages. And people strolling in and out of the stores. Two kids throwing a rubber ball to each other. A dog yelping and a little girl asking her mother to buy her one of those. He tossed the cigarette away into the gutter.

What would it be if there suddenly came the terrifying wail of the siren? The calmness now swept away like chalk from a blackboard. And the two men earnestly talking would stop and their eyes would anxiously search the sky. The old woman with the packages—she would half rise and fall back on the bench again, terrified. The old woman trying to cross the street would pause and search the sky and now return to the sidewalk and run in an old woman's way for shelter.

Now, off in the distance, there'd be the heavy, ominous drone of many planes, with the silver sausage balloons brilliant in the sun, high over the city, daring the invader to come ahead. And now the guns, quick puffs of black ugly smoke appearing in the sky, and the steady yet frantic sound of the pounding guns mingled with the dreaded sounds of explodings everywhere in the city.

And, suddenly, a mother and her child caught. The mother, with unconcealed terror in her face, running for shelter. The child dragging along, crying, frightened. The mother clutching the child to her breast as the bombs begin to fall in the street.

And, God Almighty, the brutal, mad pattern of the bombs in the street, uprooting the heart and spilling the blood and crushing the bone and snatching the child away from the mother and hurling it like a clod of mud against a wall, splattering it beyond recognition. Buildings crumbling from the blasts and glass flying, murderous knives in all directions. Crazy, insane destruction of calmness and peace as the planes sweep by overhead like passionless automata. And now the rushing, crowding, screaming of people running from stricken houses and buildings and shelters and the pitiful, hopeless searching for the broken, shattered bodies and the fires sweeping through the city and the broken gas mains and water pipes and dirt and rubble and dust and the voices, shrieking, wailing, pleading, painful, dying, dying, dying, Jesus God, as human beings weren't meant to die! . . .

Hank's eyes were shut. His heart beat fast. He felt a tremendous weight on his legs. His body, inside, was tight and trembling. He thought of Ruth. A cold sweat on his forehead. And Ruth, too. Now a sick and ugly flutter in the pit of his stomach, and all of it beginning to clear as a

voice penetrated his mind and he opened his eyes and saw Charley Peterson, City Editor of the *Oratanum Daily*.

"Hank, for crying out loud! How are you?" Charley said.

Hank blinked. He sat up and squeezed his eyelids together, then opened them again and said: "Hello, Charley."

Charley Peterson sat down beside him on the bench. "Boy," he said, "you were deep in thought there, Hank. Had to call you three times before you came out of it."

Hank sighed. "I guess I was thinking," he said.

"I guess you were. How are you, Hank?"

"Fine."

"It's good to see you."

Hank smiled. "I was going up to the office this afternoon. Thompson in?"

"Sure. He'll be glad to see you. Are you coming back?"

"I don't know yet."

"We can use you, Hank. Anytime you say."

"I was just resting," Hank said. "I was going up to see Thompson after I rested."

"How's the leg?"

"O.K. You going to the office?"

"Yes."

"I'll come along."

The editorial office of the *Oratanum Daily* was as dirty as it had ever been. Papers, torn and crumpled and unused sheets, were strewn all over the floor. There was much clattering of typewriters and moving around and phones ringing and the muffled sound from the two teletype machines in the glass-enclosed room over in a corner.

There were new faces he had never seen before. But everybody looked at him as though he were not a stranger. Three or four people he knew came over and shook hands with him and were glad to see him back and how was he getting along?

Charley said he'd be right back, and in a few minutes Ed Thompson came out of his office, big, heavy, wide face and bright blue watery eyes, holding his hand out, grinning.

"Goddamnit, Hank! How the hell are you?"

Hank smiled.

"Good to see you," Ed Thompson said.

Hank shook hands.

Ed Thompson took him by the arm and directed him to the office he used which was situated just off the main editorial room. Inside, Hank sat down in a soft chair the other side of Thompson's desk. Thompson shut the door. Suddenly, Hank began to feel a little uneasy. He wasn't sure why. His legs were still trembling slightly from before. But it wasn't that.

Ed Thompson went around the desk and sat down in his chair. He placed his feet, crossed, up on the desk. He held out a pack of cigarettes, but Hank shook his head.

"Cut down on smoking?" Ed Thompson said.

"Some. I just threw one away."

Hank placed his cane across his lap and sat back. He still felt uneasy, but it wasn't as strong now. Why should he feel it at all? Thompson? That was silly. Thompson couldn't make him do anything he didn't want to do. No. That wasn't it at all. Maybe Thompson, but not the other thing. He kept his eyes on the papers on Thompson's desk.

"How's the leg, Hank?"

Hank glanced up. Smiled. "Not bad. It's coming along."

"Good." Ed Thompson sighed and placed his hands behind his head, leaving the burning cigarette dangling from his lips. And just then Hank knew that Ed Thompson would say: "I guess you want your old job back." He was already shaking his head, but he did not realize it until he saw Ed Thompson's face change into a look of surprise. Then he saw Thompson draw his feet slowly off the desk, settle them on the floor, and come forward in the chair with his body, both hands grasping the arms of the chair firmly. Now Ed Thompson spoke in an astonished, inquiring way: "No?"

Hank felt the silence that had swept into the room. All at once he understood why he had not rushed back here in the beginning. He realized now why he had wanted to think about it first.

"I didn't come back here for my old job," he said.

Ed Thompson's face was wide and open. He stared at Hank across the desk. Then he took a deep puff on his cigarette, took the cigarette out of his mouth, and settled back in his chair.

"We can put you in," he said. He paused, and then a half-pleading, half-impatient tone came into his voice: "Goddamnit, Hank, I was counting on you to handle all military news. Maybe even a column."

"I didn't come back for my *old* job," Hank said.

Suddenly Ed Thompson smiled. "Oh!" he said and laughed. "I didn't get you at first. Of course, I don't mean *old* job. Now this column I've got . . ."

But Hank was shaking his head again as he heard and saw Ed Thompson's words fading away into the surprised look again. Thompson stopped talking. He stared at Hank for a long moment. "What goes?" he said.

Hank was still shaking his head, very slowly now. And, though his eyes were on the papers on Thompson's desk, he did not see them. Instead, he saw himself sitting on the bench outside the library, seeing and feeling again the bombs falling on the streets of Oratanum. And then, with a sudden shock, he recalled Ruth's words and he realized that, subconsciously, for a long time he had been thinking about bombs falling on America, on American homes and American people, so that they'd understand something about war. That thought drove into him so violently that he jerked his head up, his eyes widened and stared directly into Ed Thompson's eyes. Thompson recoiled into his chair, then half rose, but Hank held his hand out and said: "Wait a minute, Ed. Wait a minute."

Ed Thompson settled slowly back into his chair. He came forward, however, and sat like a man ready to leap.

"I'm sorry," Hank said. "I just thought of something. Something just occurred to me."

"You all right, Hank?"

"Yes, yes, I'm all right. I wish everybody would stop asking me how I feel. I feel all right. Look, Ed." He leaned over slightly. His eyes shifted from Ed Thompson's face to the window behind him. He gazed out over the roof of the printing plant to the buildings that ran along Main Street. "What I meant by not wanting my old job back again was this." He spoke slowly, laboriously. It was as though he were trying to remember words and phrases he had memorized a long time ago. "The old job wasn't any good," he said. "It didn't prepare me for what had to be done. It didn't hold up for me when I went into combat." He paused and moved his glance back to Thompson's face. "Do you understand?"

Ed Thompson shook his head.

"No," Hank said. "Now look. There was a lieutenant who came into our outfit just before we moved into combat. That was bad to begin with. This guy used to spout off a lot about fighting for God and coun-

try, for right against wrong, for the home, the family, the good old days, the old corner drugstore. Listen, Ed," Hank said, his cheeks reddening. "The bastard used to carry those Nash-Kelvinator magazine advertisements around with him. We'd always catch him reading those things. They were like his Bible. He talked big and talked a lot and made everybody in the outfit jittery because he was an eager boy, a stupid eager sonofabitch, and it was his stupidity that caused our whole company to be almost wiped out." Hank paused and began to shake his head again, his eyes lowering to the papers on the desk. "He didn't deserve to live. I'm glad they killed him. He was a murderer." His voice seemed to fade away into the room, and once again he looked up into Ed Thompson's face. "You don't understand, do you?" he said. And before Ed Thompson could do or say anything: "No, you don't. How can you?" He edged forward in his chair. He held the cane tightly in his hands. I understand what I'm saying, he thought. It's so clear to me. I've *got* to make him understand, he thought. Suddenly, that seemed the most important thing he'd ever had to do. And, somehow, Ruth entered into the room and stood beside him. And behind Ed Thompson, floating into the room through the windowpane, came some of the faces that grinned, some that were twisted, some that just looked. And then he said in a voice that seemed to ring in his ears: "Years ago, on this paper, I wrote a story of a high-school football game." His voice was certain now. "There was a Negro boy on one of those high-school teams. That day the kid stole the show. He was easily the best player on either team. I wrote my story around him. I pointed out what he had done, how fast he had been, how he had run rings around everybody. When I brought that story in here you said to me we don't play up 'niggers' on this paper."

Hank paused and saw Thompson's expression change slightly. He felt the sweat coming out all over his body. It wasn't that he was afraid of what he was saying. It was, rather, that he was finally saying the words that had been lying inside him for so very long.

Ed Thompson was shaking his head again, but not from any lack of understanding. Hank continued, quickly now: "And then, later, there was the airport strike. That you'll also remember, Ed. You knew, and I knew, and everybody knew that the management was wrong. And yet that story was changed, too."

This time Ed Thompson came forward in his chair. "Hold on, Hank," he said. "I couldn't help that. Rand was the one who changed it. Not me."

"I know Rand changed it. But that was all the more reason why that story should have appeared the way it was written. The way things actually were."

"Hank, you're not talking sense."

Hank smiled for the first time since he had entered Thompson's office. "I'd expect you to say that, Ed. Now look. I was as much to blame as you. I let you change the Negro story. And I said nothing about the strike story. So it was my fault, too. But if there's one thing I learned in this war it's this—I'm not talking that kind of sense any more. It was just that kind of sense you're talking about that helped get us into a war. And it's just that kind of sense that'll help us get into another war. It's just that kind of sense that's wrapped up in the old job. In all the old jobs full of old ideas, and old stupid hatreds, and rotten old principles." Hank settled back, and his eyes were staring into Ed Thompson's eyes. And his voice lowered almost to a whisper, yet it seemed to fill the room like a voice in a huge, empty hall. "I didn't have an easy time in this war. Neither did many others like me. But this war did something for me. For me this war was like a great big physic. It cleaned me out. And I intend to stay clean."

Ruth was no longer beside him. And the faces had floated out of the room. And Ed Thompson was smiling. Hank saw him smiling. And it was not a smile of humor. Yes, it was. Humor, but with something else, too. It was as though Ed Thompson had just witnessed an embarrassing incident and didn't know whether to laugh or keep a straight face. That smile annoyed Hank. It seemed to him that Thompson was laughing, politely. And then he was certain as he heard Thompson say: "You're taking this war mighty seriously, aren't you?"

There was an abrupt moment of dead silence in the room.

"What I mean," Ed Thompson said hastily, "is that I—I can understand the way . . ."

"Jesus!"

". . . you—I understand the way you feel, Hank. Goddamnit, Hank, all that stuff on racial equality—I agree with you. Sure. I admit I was wrong about the football th-thing. O.K., I . . ." he paused and could not seem to go on.

Hank sat forward in his chair and kept looking Ed Thompson in the eyes. Then he said: "I was fighting for something you're not ready to understand."

Ed Thompson did not answer. Nor did he seem *able* to answer. He

looked incapable even of thought. His expression was blank and embarrassed, without humor now, and instead, the touch of fear had entered his eyes. And the way he sat, the look on his face, suddenly reminded Hank of an Italian newspaperman, an editor, whom he had seen dragged through the streets of Naples after the Germans had been thrown out of the Italian port. The newspaperman had been a collaborator and had, finally, come into the hands of the people. Thompson's look was not the weakened, frightened look the Italian had, but it could turn into that. It could very easily turn into that.

I was fighting for something you're not ready to understand, Hank thought. What a stupid thing to say! It was not a matter of his being *ready* to understand. Thompson understood. Hank saw that now. Thompson had made his decision. It wasn't hard and fast. It depended on how things were going. Thompson understood perfectly well. I was fighting for something. Jesus!

"You're not ready to understand," Hank said. "What the hell am I talking about? You know what you want, Ed. You know Goddamned well what you want." He stood up. There was no other sound in the room except the moving sound of his body rising and walking toward the door. When he reached the door, and just before he opened it, he turned around and said in a slow quiet voice: "It's O.K. Everything is good, Ed. *Now* everything is good."

Hank opened the door and went out of the office, shutting the door softly behind him.

# THE BALLAD OF THE NAMELESS ONE

by

Robert E. Hayden

They are building his gallowstree: He hears
from the static darkness of his cell
the hammers' peroration.

*windrise in feverbrilliant South*

All night the torsions, hooded promises:
Mercy and Africa, black boy,
if you will speak the names.

Now hammers rouse the brass and sulphur day,
cry holiday to Christian folk,
warning to cofflehaunted slaves.

*scatters like erosion's dust*

> And we were many and would have risen from
> this nothingness, this death,
> but for those whimpering servitors of death.

The hammers cease. He hears the heavy footsteps,
rhetorical keys approach, pace off
the little distance that remains between
the vision and its jerking effigy.

*the rumor and the fear*

# WHO COULD HAVE BEEN A MAN

by

Vincent Ferrini

The soles of his shoes were lead
Even when the sandpipers
Ate the brown ordure of the ocean
A blue morning sang

The old country was dull as the brass belt buckle
But real as the ties of random letters

His pants and coat were woven of silence
Only the guitar and the oboe
Freed him

Although he came to her as a lover
They were like strangers
While he sought for communication
In a morass of meetings with holes in them

In the workshop of his bones
Were sticks and straws
And crooked nails
To build the bridges of decisions
Which always collapsed
Leaving the jagged edges of the wrecks
Sticking out of his body

Nightly and alone he supped at the Greek restaurant
That was the food of home
But never like home

The long days and years
Had a destination
Like a tale without
A meaning for the boarding room
And the floors kept falling down
In the anemia of his mind
The streets couldn't connect
Time broke off with ravines

His words were sensitive as moth wings
And his looks soft as the pulp
That releases tears
Almost asking without knowing
In the cloud of sleep
Why hadn't his father met another woman
Instead of his mother
Or his mother another man

His palms had ropes of scars
Beaten there by the bosses
And the dream of what life could be
Fed his mind
To endure the whips of oppression

Alone with the public library
Longing for happiness

The stairs of the boardinghouse
Rose to the empty room
And the years of loneliness cold as the waiting grave

Go-betweens brought them together
The pallor of superstition
Behind her eyeballs
In an atmosphere of black cloth and artificial flowers

Her legs were rooted in the straitjacket of the past
The cheekbones of each
Undisclosed the childhood alien to the other
The keys in her pocketbook
Did not belong to her

Nor to him
They were given by the ring

Her body divided into shadows trying to find him
And became flesh again
Intimate but a stranger's
Two rivers met to flow separately

Sitting on the broken glasses
Of this marriage
With his hands holding his head
And mind that knew no sleep

The bed was too small
The rooms kept growing smaller too

When freed in the company of forgetfulness
She tracked him down like a bloodhound
With eyes spitting venom and injury
Weeping at the desertion
Shame welted his brow

In the trap of mistake
The premonition of disaster
Raised bricks in his path

The complaining joy that was her face hid apprehension
Briers pinched her right auricle
And the fear of losing him
Made her close tight the mouth of the house

In the cellar the unborn love grew moldy
The smell of it seeping up three floors
Into the furniture
Bringing mushrooms of pain and cancers

Wherever he turned the walls held him in
At work the walls tightened around him
The streets bound his feet
His friends were locked in themselves

The sea once green
Now was a black abyss
Beckoning him

Bed of burrs and anguish and sweat
Tossing in the narrow doom of night
Left his body a wet rag
And she beside him in a prison
Reaching with her hands for God's help

The radio was an ancient ornament
The icebox had long disappeared
The table had no meaning
The air became chunks of lead
He could not swallow
Envisioning the rose of peace
He drank the sleep of gas
Absorbing his legs hands eyes mind and shoulders
Meeting death downward on the kitchen floor
As a drunk meets sleep

# TWO POEMS

by

Don Gifford

## *SNAIL*

The snail that carves his feather stitch in sand
is all creatures, grains, pebbles, leaves
desolate in the focus of a hand,
is all artist and art told in the morning
before the sun is able to destroy.

Before the sun can force its
dull belief in light
to the midday point
to the beginning of possession
to the death of sight.

Before I am about with unheeding feet
to destroy artist and his stitch
to possess and waken death at noonday
with an accidental shout.

## *MARETH*

For there are no sides down there
by the river,
neither sides

nor hiding place
nor brother feeling in the hollow square,
merely vast aloneness
and a barely discernible light
as of Charon crossing,
stragglers meeting stragglers
amid the roaring of dislocate spheres.

I have been to the riverside in spring,
in a dry spring after peace,
remarking sword and shield and petrol can laid down;
greeted with point and place
greeted with explanation and authority
noticing neither water nor plant
neither continuity nor fertility.
Wherefrom the idea of river?
from a chance conversation about the dead:
—Those you knew are gone, he said.

# THESE WHO SHORN RETURN

by

Belle Turnbull

Those years there was the wind, always the wind
Raking our peaks whence help, it is said, cometh,
Savaging the underside of fur,
Tearing at trees, choking the cabin-breath
Down again in our chimneys. Those were the years
Everything that was fastened came unhinged.

Boys kept blowing away, do you remember?
Live hair stood in the wind, in the wind rushing,
Young fingers made the V in a blur of trumpets . . .
These who shorn return, whose drifting eyes
Lift to our peaks whence help (it is said) cometh
Mark there the sign inverse, the edged reminder.

# TWO POEMS

by

Edith Conklin

## *SUNDAY AT THE ZOO*

The lion in his concrete Africa
lies drowsing among tame bones.
Surfeited with angels' tongues
we too would make oblivion our afternoon,
but a child chattering of a red balloon
would not bargain for a lesser wonder.

Power sleeps. Across those passive features
sway the shadow's iron verticals.
The sun that glitters captive in his pupils
resumes its caravan across the west.
We feel the dream wake in the greatest beast,
roaring and shaking our uncertain bars.

No madness now is known as dangerous.
Powerful as gold, he is our god:
all flesh becomes dominion of a pride
whose kingship is the single right to kill!
White unicorns, the years, whirl and encircle
the murderer with chains of staring eyes.

The circus is reversed. His royalty
weathers to an image cut in stone

the smallest children dare to ride upon;
saint's clown and scarlet pet
dreams out the Sundays of defeat
storming the white, forbidden jungles of the sky.

## *NO BITTER BRIDE*

Roses pierce and fill me
as they brim
noon like a vase. I exude
the attar of their damask peace,
the day and I, both glass.

But yesterday, the gifts
of pale arbutus
smuggled over my hostile borders
froze in the false climate, and were
crushed by impatient wheels.

Sleep broke over that day
as it will
cascade over this in soundless
black combers of unconsidered hours.
What shall I be tomorrow?

After the drowning voyage
what resurrection
looms? The structures of existence
await the coming creature. The snail
wakes to its self-whorled shell.

Day ends as death that dream
is angel in;
death of the rotted self by self's own
knife, those anguished midnights on
the gray infernal beach . . .

. . . the little girl is dead.
See, she lies
in a basket of sand. A fancied look

hangs over her like the seaborne face
of one floating to far isles,

and youth's proud husk is shed
to dry on the shore
under a dim tomb decked
with useless weapons, with a veil,
and a chaplet of tears . . .

But I cannot weep for old murder
in this rose garden.
Loss is the undertow that pulls
at the buoyancy of flesh, the keel
love must be pilot for.

Like the free-flying gull
soft-folded on
its photograph in water, I am
at once myself and nature
for this single hour,

and grief is the powerful path
to lure a bride
risen loveless from her ashen waters.
Under the yellow or under the black horizon
death drives his flowering car.

# BLUE AERIAL

by

James Turner Jackson

Charlie Beech lived on a county road near White Cloud, in the northern part of Michigan, and there he was troubled by a wet brain and a basement full of glass. Along with a flimsy garage, a grape-shaded privy, and a one-story frame house, the basement was inherited from his father, Charlie Beech, Senior, who had accumulated this last and most curious portion of his son's legacy through years of hard drinking on the cellar stairs. The wet brain which afflicted him was Charlie's own doing.

When old Mr. Beech died about fifteen years ago, at eighty-one years of age, the neighbors roundabout claimed a squirrel would have been stretched to hide a small hickory nut—let alone another bottle—in the old man's basement. And after a lengthy appraisal, which was conducted at the elder Beech's "laying in," they placed the number of empties down there at a conservative ten thousand.

But the old man had been particular. He had never liked to drink before his son. Yet on returning from his funeral, young Charlie, who was around fifty at the time, took up where his father left off. And since his wife wouldn't have him drinking "in public," meaning by this the first and only floor of the house, in a short while Charlie had joined his father's spirit on the cellar steps, and there, almost every night afterwards, he would drink a number of quiet beers. It was some deference to his father, perhaps, that made Charlie always carry the empties out to the trash heap before going to bed.

Occasionally, forgetting he was down there, his wife Rita turned out his single light bulb from above. At such times Charlie usually remained

where he was, quietly drinking in the dark, without any protest. After ten years of this, along with his periodic bouts with hard liquor up in White Cloud, Charlie had acquired what is known—in a loose medical way—as a wet brain.

His mind was lulled and watery even, but less abnormal than inoperative; and up to this time it was never violent, never maniacal. He restricted himself to a kind of effortless domesticity, the house serving as both his shelter and his occupation. For since his affliction, Charlie had not worked a day in five years.

To support the household, Rita worked up in White Cloud. She let Charlie put out the dog, clean the stove, and play the radio. And on Sundays, when the house was crowded with relatives and in-laws, she tactfully sent him tramping downstairs so as not to spoil the evening games of pinochle and five hundred.

Charlie's interests numbered very few, but these he considered at great length. For many years the imponderable in his life was Mrs. Merriman, a neighbor woman; and when she went away, the burden of his musing was transferred elsewhere, in such a way as to cost him his wife and his home and, shortly thereafter, his life.

On weekday mornings, after listening to Rita drive off toward town, Charlie liked to stand in the front doorway. Here he pondered the scene: he took up the business of the day. Often he paused there for hours, musing, shuffling in and out of his slippers—luxuriously if the floor was warm—with a coffee cup still in his hand. It was a blind door, and from its stepless sill Charlie watched the bluebead insulators of the aerial, which, at first, was second only to Mrs. Merriman in his contemplations. The wire waved tense and shining from the roof peak above his head out to the road, where it fastened to a telephone pole. In every season it glistened brightly over the maple shoots Rita had set out, the two broken rose ladders and whitewashed border stones, and the half-buried tire, also whitewashed, which she put there to enclose a vague trilogy of dried and dead geraniums.

And while he lingered, the scene would grow pale with sunlight. There was little to see. In such a place, an aerial became a mystery, a shiny token of faith, a tangible support to which a man's dignity and pride might be appended. In August the land was rutted and scabrous with heat, and the house itself lonesome and faded, built where a suburb was once planned and then abandoned. By some quirk in the realtor's mind, the other houses had been closely grouped. But Charlie's was the

exception. Directly across the road was the farm of Jesse Merriman. And within a half-mile radius, there was not another place.

The farmhouse was big enough to obstruct the beating sun. At noonday it rose there large and ugly, the light shadowing in its bays, and above it, shooting up, was a tall green poplar tree.

It was the largest tree for miles around, straight, narrow, gleaming, and shadowless. Charlie would look from the tree back to his aerial, the two beads of porcelain now winking at him, now dazzling his eyes. For years he inwardly raged at this tree, which alone in all the surrounding area might be said to contest his aerial's pre-eminence. He followed its seasons with a murked and hazy zeal: spring, when it cottoned out, sending graceful puffs of poplar lint that floated across the road onto his yard. And summer, when it flickered all day long, rustling, whispering incessantly. And winter, when it stood proud and black above the snow, a bare straight pole, a frozen thrust of branches.

But the aerial had a simpler pride, a lesser mystery for him, and more than that, Charlie maintained, it reached further than the tree. It brought in far-off distant places, Detroit, Chicago, the two coasts remote beyond their mountains. It was a silver arc of great silence, and at times a communicant pulsing and jogging with voices. Late at night, growing more reluctant, the voices drew back. Lights were put out. Then Charlie listened hard. A faint lonely noise came like a sound whirling in his mind. Finally it hung there in the moon, a glinting silvery loop, humming still, but with secrets unvoiced to him.

In such a manner, Charlie would wait until twelve o'clock, gazing out from the doorway, his vigil eased somewhat by trips to the kitchen for a cold beer.

For five years he had seen Mrs. Merriman daily. She came out to the porch after her morning chores were done, in winter to spud the ice from the eaves and steps, in summer to sit in the cool while she shelled peas for supper and darned stockings for her son. Charlie would nod his head. Mrs. Merriman would nod back. But then Jesse, her husband, would open the screen door and beckon to her. At that point Charlie's stare became rueful, then querulous, and finally it shaded away to a languid gaze, diffident and rheumy and unseeing.

Merriman and his wife would go inside. Charlie, in turn, would back away from the door, switch on the radio, and while away the afternoon with soap operas and glittering ballroom waltzes from Chicago.

The year he died Charlie had gone to the hospital in July with an

attack of the bloats. This condition he suffered periodically, and the routine of it was always the same. The doctor drove out from White Cloud, diagnosed cirrhosis of the liver, and sent him into town. Once in the hospital, he always improved, was discharged after several weeks, and was sent home. This particular year Charlie returned in August.

The morning after his latest and, as it happened, his last arrival, Charlie hurried through his breakfast, then ambled carefully toward the front door. After a long and welcoming glance, something struck him as wrong. For some reason the farmhouse looked different to him. Charlie observed it awhile, complaining of his feet in a low voice, his glance listless and perfunctory. There was a black wreath pinned on the door. And while he watched, another face—not Mrs. Merriman's—appeared in the glass. It was Jesse's face, and a thought flowed slowly to him, Where was the missus?

Merriman's son was playing in the ditch by the road, cutting down goldenrod with his pocketknife. Yet where was his mother, Charlie pondered, plump Mrs. Merriman, her quick fingers and flashing kitchen knife topping radishes and turnips on the shady porch?

The two husbands stared across at each other, their faces pale in the sun, their eyes negligent, cautious, scornful. Then Charlie retired in the shadow of his doorway. Jesse Merriman retired similarly in his, a moment later. They continued to stare back and forth, without giving any sign of recognition.

"She's been thrown into chains," Charlie muttered. This he disregarded for another conjecture. "They've hidden her somewhere." The leaves hung from the wreath, glossy and black. No, they had used her up, thanklessly, after all these years of burdening labor and service. But in his mind, the identity of They refused to reveal itself. Charlie began to feel a small, growing enmity toward Mr. Merriman.

The boy came trotting across the road. He went up the two-rut drive, hopped over the whitewashed stones, skirted the tire garden, and stood beneath the blind door, looking up.

And lulled there in the door's shadow, warmed and pacified by the morning heat, Charlie felt a dim, shadowy triumph. Her son needed him, anyway.

"Hi, Mr. Beech."

"Not so well, not so well," Charlie said, starting instantly to complain. "I s'pose you been asking after me, sonny?"

"Guess not, Mr. Beech."

"Then you come around back. I can tell you some terrible things," Charlie said. "About the bloats."

The boy trotted around back. Soon Charlie heard him call, and he broke off staring in the doorway, and filed back to the kitchen to let the boy in.

"Pretty. You got a good heart in you, sonny," Charlie said. He was counting the boy's flowers with his eyes.

"Yuh. I got them for Ma."

Charlie opened a beer. He told the boy about the hospital in White Cloud and the bloats, adding lurid details from his own depiction of what had befallen Mrs. Merriman. Then he drank two or three more, the boy watching him.

"You want something to bury?" Charlie asked, twirling one of the bottles by its neck.

"Sure. You bet, Mr. Beech," the boy said. He was now gazing rapt at the beading sweat on the glass, the slog and tilt of the foam.

"Then hang onto it with both hands," Charlie warned him. And he gave the bottle to the boy and told him to get.

When Rita returned from work in the evening, she found Charlie resting solemnly in an iron, sun-blistered chair out by the garage. She took one look at him and asked, "What's the matter with you?"

"Jesse Merriman's boy . . ." Charlie said.

"They got their troubles over there," Rita said, taking bundles from the car. "Just like I got mine."

"He thought it up all by himself," Charlie said, rubbing his hands together. The palms were dry and powdery.

"You old bastard," Rita yelled from the kitchen. "C'mon and get your supper!"

"Look in the bedroom too," Charlie said. "There's some goldenrod. More flowers. Look and see."

The next day, as Charlie was watching from the door, a long black car pulled up before the farmhouse. Jesse Merriman had backed his Ford into the yard. Three of the men and Jesse went inside and carried out a long box. It was a fine shade of gray with bronze rosettes on the grip bars. Then the big car started up, and Jesse followed it down the road in his Ford.

Where had Jesse gone? Charlie let his gaze wander vaguely in the dust forms on the road. Then a dry patter of steps moved toward him, and Charlie wondered, Wasn't he in the car too?

"Hi, Mr. Beech!"

Today a black band was sewed around his sleeve. The boy's face looked up at him eagerly. Perhaps he brought a note, a missive, a testament from his departed mother expressly for his eyes.

"You got something to say to me? A word or two . . . special?" Charlie asked.

The boy looked very puzzled. "Pa's gone," he said.

Gone where? But he didn't ask. "Well, you go around back, sonny," Charlie said.

He looked once more. The aerial flexed on its knobs, serious, steadfast, a lax silver tension of wire guyed between roof and pole, playing with divers currents, many musics, and many voices, and all at his behest, his very finger tips. When they were seated at the kitchen table, Charlie decided to ask it definitely this time.

"Just you over there . . . nobody else?"

"Yuh. It's pretty quiet. And nobody's around to play with."

"I can play the radio," Charlie offered. "That'll make some noise."

And then, since the serials weren't on yet, Charlie played the Shopping News and the Morning Musicales. The boy kept fooling with his armband. Charlie decided this was no occasion for a stroll down to Green Crick, or to anywhere. "I'm going down cellar," he said. If the boy didn't ask, he would lead him down there, anyway. A friendly boy he was . . . after his mother.

The boy looked at him.

"Can I go along with you? Please Mr. Beech?"

"Sure, sonny."

On their way down, Charlie was muttering to himself, "It's pride and vainglory, little fellow. Somebody ought to take a crosscut to your old man's tree. A plague and abomination of a tree."

But the boy whispered instantly when he saw them. In the dim light they glinted with a blue opalescence. "Jeez, look. Look at all the bottles," he said, and Charlie sat down beside him somewhat appeased and mollified.

"I guess I got plenty."

"How many do you think?"

"Nine or ten thousand maybe."

"Like silver. Buried treasure," the boy said. The light ran in the glass, milky, blue, silver, brown, and black, pooling in soft streaked glisters. "I buried what you gave me, Mr. Beech."

"Ah . . ." Charlie said. "Sure thing?"

He mused quietly. The farmhouse was alone over there, the poplar nodding unguarded, a tree that had stood sentinel while they took her away, Mrs. Merriman, who had nodded to him—a small thing for which to punish anyone. Charlie pulled on his slippers, rose, and went down the steps. From the littered floor he unearthed three or four bottles, felt of them, and with a gadget on his fob opened them. The segmented foam bubbled at their lips, gaseous and airy, running over.

"I ain't telling you what to do now, sonny," Charlie said. He racked the bottles on the steps.

"No, Mr. Beech . . ."

"I'm going upstairs now, little fellow."

"Can I stay down here and play?"

"Your pa's gone and all?"

"He don't mind, Mr. Beech."

Charlie nodded. At the head of the stairs he looked back, once more. When he returned to the house, the cellar door was open and the Merriman boy was gone.

Rita was late getting home from work. After supper she washed up and started to mend his socks. Charlie lingered at the table.

"Ain't seen Mrs. Merriman around of late," Charlie offered.

"Course you ain't," Rita said.

"No, sir. Not since I come home from having the bloats in White Cloud," Charlie said.

The night was hot. He could hear it fretting in the dark.

"That tree?" Charlie offered again, listening to it.

"What tree? What is it now?" his wife said.

"Some things around here ought to get killed off. That's all," Charlie concluded gravely.

"Don't you talk like that, Charlie," Rita told him. "I'm warning you now. Don't."

On the radio it was almost time for the Singing Lady. A woman of a warm, deep voice. The woman across the road had never spoken to him, and long ago he had fashioned Mrs. Merriman's voice after the Singing Lady's. Charlie shuffled to the doorway. The poplar rose in the night, a rustling spire of black, and the moon was big and yellow. In the shadows Charlie waited for something to happen. A memory kept lapping in his mind, far away, unapproachable, then he caught sight of Mr.

Merriman crossing the road, and the recollection of the boy came flooding back to him.

Charlie scampered for the bedroom. As Jesse went past the window he had time for one more glance, vague, gloating. The screen door slapped. Then he was standing over a pungent choking zone of goldenrod in his bare feet, listening hard. Their voices carried to him.

"Taken sick?" his wife said. "Sure. You go right ahead . . ."

"First the missus taken and now it's my boy," Jesse said.

Charlie moved toward the kitchen door. He saw Merriman's puzzled face near the phone. He was talking to Rita now.

"And I just come back from laying her away—my wife for over twenty years—and my boy is laying there in the parlor. Ain't a fever or anything, but he won't talk to me. So I come right over to ring the doc . . ."

"That's right, Mr. Merriman. You can't take any chances with him now. You wouldn't want to at all. Ain't he all you got left, after what's happened?"

In the living room, the radio started to boom along. Charlie was twirling the volume dial, irritably, hoping for a great wave of sound. A tune of the Old West, sung by a congregation of four, swerved noisily into the speaker, "Ki-yi-yippi-yippi-ki-yi-yay!" but Rita's voice reached out from the kitchen.

"Charlie! Charlie! Stop that! You're all right."

Obediently, Charlie tuned it down, replacing the Corncobblers with mumbling laments of his own. "Oh-h-h. I feel kind of liverish, Rita. Rita? The old heart's a little shaky."

But she was ignoring his plaints. Their voices flowed along. Then the screen door slapped. Jesse's head again moved past the window.

The doctor's headlights came up the road, running in the dust harshly, brushing the weeded shoulders. They probed for the drive-in to Merriman's place, then swam around, loomed up over the bluff, and disappeared. The red, twinkling taillights switched on. The gravel stirred. A light seemed to blow on in the hallway. Charlie saw the doctor standing on the porch, suddenly yellow and absorbed, and Jesse Merriman's face at the door, moving inward laced by the screen, frayed and pocked with shadow. The doctor went inside.

"Why don't you go down cellar for a spell?" Rita said. "I got enough here." Such instructions were rare from his wife. There was something on her mind too, Charlie figured.

So he remained at the sink, fixing himself a glass of soda.

"Now, Rita . . . heart's kind of shaky. Guess maybe the doc ou; at to stop by for me. You tell him, Rita?"

"He don't need reminding. He'll drop in all by himself. The doc'd know better than pass up a big important patient like you," Rita said, and this time her voice sounded exasperated and bitter.

Then, while they waited, Rita ironed and Charlie kept taking his pulse. They heard the doctor leave Merriman's. He walked into their kitchen, laughing and jovial. "Well, I've seen everything now," the doc said. "Every blessed thing. First I thought it might be typhoid. (How you feeling, Charlie? Good. Good.) Why, that poor motherless youngster . . . he was bory-eyed drunk! How he got himself—must've snuck down cellar while his dad's off to the funeral and tried tapping the brandy barrel, though I always thought Jesse wasn't a——" Here the doctor paused.

"You'll stay and have some coffee, Doc?" Rita asked.

Ah, Charlie murmured. It *was* something. Everybody was in on it, the neighbors too, most likely. And in their stricken blindness they had tried to hide it from him. It had probably started when he was in White Cloud, having the bloats.

"Can't stay," the doc said. "Wife's outside in the car. Might drop in on Jesse, though. He could stand some coffee or a jog of something even stronger maybe. Good night, Rita. That's the boy, Charlie!"

Rita followed the doctor out to his car. Charlie could hear her questioning him.

"Lord, no! Don't think so," the doctor said. "Guess Jesse's not such a teetotaler as all that. Of course I didn't want to ask him, the boy just investigating a little on his own, you know. I didn't even tell him what it was, because of his wife and all. And the boy wasn't harmed any to speak of."

"Mr. Merriman say anything else about it, Doc?" Rita asked.

"Terribly upset, of course. I guess you could say anything Jess said was natural, under the circumstances."

"Like what, Doc? Didn't mention Charlie, did he?"

"Now, Rita. He was only thinking of his boy. He said he just co uldn't lose him now. That sort of thing. Why, I think Jesse'd shoot the doctor told him his boy was really sick. You got your hands full now, Rita. Charlie's like your diabetic, wonderful tolerance to his own affl ction, but anything else, any bump, bruise, fall, some unallied injury c any

kind, and he's in trouble. Serious trouble. You got worries of your own, so don't take on anything more."

And then the doctor drove off. But not before Charlie had slipped away from the kitchen door.

Rita entered the kitchen. In the first thirty seconds after that she had grabbed at the goldenrod, kicked open the screen door, thrown the stalks wildly into the night, and let the door slam.

"You keep your flowers out of this house, do you hear! Your God-damned goldenrod!" Rita yelled.

"You know what the doc said?" she was yelling now with her face to the cellar door. "He said Jesse Merriman'd shoot the man fools around with his boy . . . Charlie!"

The door opened. Charlie stared out at her, musing, his mouth puckered and a bottle in his hand.

"Don't turn out the light on me, Rita," Charlie said quietly. "Storm's coming, Rita. (It'll make a beeline for that poplar, I bet you. It'll give that tree a stingerful of lightning.) You just wait and see."

But the weather held. It was a legendary August monotone of weather, yellow and bright. The paint checked in the eaves, and each night, after supper, Rita went out to hose small puddles around the maple shoots. Heat drove through the thin planking of the house, the rooms closed in, stunned, and the roof was a dizzy sun-leaping grid of asbestos. Yet Charlie remained inside, stationed imperviously at his post in the doorway.

A week or so passed. At the farmhouse the black wreath was taken down. And now both men watched behind their doors, observing a placid ritual of scrutiny, Jesse bolt upright in a rocker in his parlor, his eyes fixed and expressionless, and Charlie nodding behind the netting of the blind door, his face blurred, his bare feet shuffling wearily over the rugless floor.

"I'm keeping tab on this whole business. Murder and death," Charlie muttered from time to time. "And when I get ready, you'd better have an eye peeled for me."

The poplar tree swam in his gaze, windless now, yet the green leaves freckling with light. He foresaw the storm that would crash its trunk, the electrifying bolt like the hand of God. In the afternoon he listened for static on the radio, attending religiously all the weather reports. And when the speaker made a rackety noise, he let his head go back, and heard far-off thunder that rolled at the farmhouse, drumming closer,

and he saw the tree crashing in a wilderness of bright raw splinters, yet all the while his aerial holding taut and firm, untouched, untrammeled, its silver thread whirring valiantly in the great wind, and the bluebeads of the insulators sparking and glowing in the lightning flash. Then he imagined Jesse's eyes fixed covetously on his aerial, the winking terminals, but Jesse hoping otherwise than he hoped, for a storm to strike at his house, to burn and rend and tear the gleaming wire from its sockets in the pole and the roof peak.

Finally the boy appeared in the yard. He played lackadaisically with a broken clock. Several times he glanced furtively toward the house, his eyes searching the doorway. Then his father's chair thumped down on the floor inside. The boy took fright, dropped the clock. He ran back and went inside.

It was the last day in August when Charlie saw the cars coming up the road. They were drinking coffee in the kitchen. "Auction?" Charlie said. "Why ain't I been told?"

"I told you fifty times," Rita said. "Anyhow, can't you even read any more? They got signs tacked up all over the county. That's why the cars are coming."

"Merriman's auction . . ." Charlie said. "You go buy an ax."

"We got a hatchet now," Rita said. "A perfectly good hatchet. What do we want with an ax?"

Charlie was listening to the aerial. He didn't answer.

"Just another expense. Think you'll ever go out and chop wood with an ax? Huh?"

"Maybe. I wouldn't be so surprised," Charlie said. He was gazing out the window. "Storm's coming, Rita. Look at that poplar, would you? Weather's going to break. It'll be cold before you know it."

"And it'll freeze in hell before I catch you out back chopping wood," Rita said. "Now you be good, Charlie. While I'm over to the auction, you mind the house and stay clear of trouble."

Charlie passed the morning in the doorway. Across from him a man was stacking tables, broken chairs, a horsehair sofa, and a Hawaiian guitar. At noon Rita returned to fix his lunch.

"Coming back to the ax," Charlie greeted her. "You take your good insurance now. It's just the same as your ax. Always handy to have around." And his was the last word on the subject. Before leaving again, Rita had nodded wearily in agreement.

On her way back in the late afternoon, Charlie came shuffling out to

meet her. "You see anything? Poke around a little? What's it like, Rita? Tell me what it's like?"

"Hush," Rita said. "Don't talk like that." And she walked on past him.

"You catch any sign of her . . . the missus? Down cellar . . . up in the attic maybe?"

"Well, I guess I never saw such a place for dirt," Rita said. "Things every which way. You'd think his sister'd come out and pick up after him and the boy. But hush now."

"Then you saw him?" Charlie said. "You saw Jesse?"

And then, suddenly, Rita started to laugh. "Why, you damn crazy old fool! I think you been jealous of him. Jesse!"

"Other way around," Charlie said, staring blandly now at the farmhouse. He could see her again, Mrs. Merriman, shelling peas for supper, innocent and unwarned, and himself at his door, nodding to her courteously, chivalrously, year after year, and her husband Jesse writhing in the clear, green depths of jealousy, and the poplar tree looming over them like a cenotaph to a man cursed forever to a green demonic rage. "Well, now, Rita," Charlie said. "Maybe it's somebody else around here that's got the green fit of jealousy in him."

Up ahead Rita had to stop and bend over, she was laughing so hard. But Charlie had caught sight of something else. Over in the yard, the boy had arranged the leftover furniture. He was playing a quiet game of house. "I won't tell him," Charlie muttered. The ribbon from his mother's funeral wreath was tacked to the telephone pole. "Murder and death and jealousy. I know it all now, but I won't. Not ever," Charlie resolved.

The day after the auction, Charlie felt an attack of energy. It was a cool morning. He felt the best he had since his last attack of the bloats. A few hours would decide the whole business. At breakfast, he asked Rita about the ax she had purchased.

"You going to lay in some wood, Charlie?" Rita asked. "Thank God it ain't so cool as that just yet."

"Say, Rita. Maybe Jesse'd take it back. The ax. Maybe he'd give your money back on it."

"Well, I guess not," Rita said. "The ax is my worry, Charlie. You just let it be."

But when she left for town, Charlie went directly to the garage. He inspected the ax, the keen blue steel, the sweat-grained grip worn smooth as a mussel shell, the shiny, raw-grained throat.

On his way back he glanced at the sky. It was cooler. He saw the gray wet hanging of clouds. Hurrying now, he tuned up the radio. He heard rasping, erratic static.

He paused in the doorway, looking across his yard. A puff of wind lapped in the cotton web of netting.

The dust in the road lay moist and clinging. The weeds stirred fitfully and without apparent cause. This was yellow weather. Odd quirks of the wind and sun. A weather of spells and danger.

He felt curious pictures running in his mind. The glossy wreath. Rita. The cunning problem of Mrs. Merriman, puzzled over and solved by unremitting thought, by steadfast purpose. The boy and his black armband. The green and venomous poplar.

Now he realized that Merriman was watching from the farmhouse. The man was standing in his stripped parlor, in a sullen light. A bar of shadow jerked infrequently across his body. Charlie made him no sign of greeting, nor did Merriman.

At noon the boy came out. He played by himself for a while, hectically, jumping back and forth across the ditch, scuffing his feet in the dust, but always with his eyes averted from the house and the two men.

At five o'clock all the countryside sounds drew off. The locust ceased whining. Then the birds whipped frantically from the bushes and the oak grubs, for a few minutes chattering and circling in swift groups, and then they stilled again.

A moan of wind swept along the earth. Dust quivered in the road. Then the rain struck.

At six o'clock Charlie saw Merriman's face in a flare of light. A hollow darkness came after, thick and reeky, beating with rain. Another flash revealed the boy. He was running excitedly up and down the porch, his hands held out to cup and hold the streaming overflow from the eaves.

The air smelled green and black and musky. In an hour the gravel was racing, and the roadside was dark lentil green, and the weeds were thrashing.

Charlie felt himself shocked in the doorway. A bulge of blue fire swelled from the telephone pole. It moved ghostly and sparkling and dripping up the aerial toward his house. Charlie saw Merriman staring from his porch. The tall poplar hung with rain, blooming with a gauze of mist, leaning over the house.

Then rain began to wet his face. The insulators swelled with blue fire,

dancing electric light. But Charlie was already fumbling toward the kitchen door. He found the ax. He started down the drive.

Charlie did not remember the graveled road. But at the ditch his slipper caught in the matted weeds and goldenrod. The poplar rattled in a fury of rain. He pitched forward, the ax flying ahead. It bit with a swollen pithy tock into the blackened pole.

One of Charlie's slippers fell near by; instantly it was dotted yellow with the pollenous fur of goldenrod. The boy's abandoned clock lay near him, the face of it streaming wet. But Charlie lay tumbled in the ditch, his right arm folded underneath him.

The next day Rita Beech was up at dawn, moving into town, where she could stay at her brother's house and be near the hospital. Jesse Merriman came over to offer his condolences. "Always wished I'd got to know Charlie Beech," Jesse said. Only blinded by his own sorrows as he was . . . Was there anything he could do?

Rita let Mr. Merriman close the house for her. He pulled down the shades, turned off the water, reset the front door and bolted it; and before Rita left, he asked about the basement. Rita said the boy could have whatever was down there. It was nothing valuable.

Meanwhile Charlie lay in the hospital in White Cloud, with a broken elbow. That same day, at Ike's junkyard on the edge of town, the Merriman boy received five dollars for ten cartloads of glass, enough to pay railroad fare to his aunt's farm upstate, where he would stay until Christmas.

It was Charlie's last sickness. A week later, Charlie Beech died of delirium tremens, like his father, amid a raging host of crazy notions.

# THE NAMES ON MONUMENTS

by

Morton Fineman

MARINO sat with both feet planted on the floor of the club car, rocking slightly from the waist to the rhythm of the train. He was a swarthy, dark-browed young man with a nose that was flattened to one side. His good hand held a cigarette, resting beside the Dixie Cup full of bourbon which he sipped from time to time with an expression of sober consideration. The other hand rested on his lap. The light overhead gleamed dully on the dark glove of his artificial hand. He looked at the man in the slate-blue naval officer's uniform seated next to him, who also sipped bourbon from a Dixie Cup.

"Another cupful of this stuff and I'll be tight," Marino said. His slow resonant voice emphasized the saturnine, darkly pugnacious intensity of his face. "How does it leave you in the morning?"

"Fair," Marshall told him.

Marshall had been sitting in the club car, drinking alone, when Marino had entered and sat down, and accepted the invitation to have a drink.

"If I were a married man, I would not want to come home drunk," Marino said. "But the way it is, my old man will understand."

Marshall grinned sadly and remained silent.

"Are you a married man?" Marino asked him.

"Yes." Marshall had finished the bourbon in his cup. He took the bottle that stood on the floor beside his chair and refilled his cup. "You ready for another one, soldier?" he asked.

"I'll take it slow," Marino said. "This is something new for me. I have to get used to the burning." He brought the cup to his lips gingerly, sipping again with that thoughtful air of bemusement. "You know something," he murmured suddenly to Marshall, "this is nice and democratic, sitting in a train like this and drinking." He paused. "What is it we're drinking?"

"Bourbon," Marshall said.

After a while Marino told him, "The doctors said I needed a rest. A quiet life for a while, they told me. You are a doctor," he said, looking at Marshall. "Do I look like I need a quiet life?"

"We all need quiet lives," Marshall said.

"Are you going home too, Lieutenant?" Marino asked.

"No," Marshall said. "I'm going to a party with my wife. She is up ahead, reading a book. My wife always reads books on trains." Marshall knew he was drunk again. Whenever he felt this sense of exhilarating relief, talking about his wife to a stranger, he knew he was drunk and that he would not stop talking as long as someone would listen. It always began the same way whenever he was home. After a quarrel with Janyce, he would sit alone at a bar or a restaurant, a short bronzed man, with soft gray eyes and a delicately arched nose where the skin was peeled along the ridge. He would sit or stand with his strong slim fingers folded before him; or stare for long moments at his nails that were always carefully filed, wondering why he would sit so long and drink because he was unhappy, and never do anything at all about it. Then he would start the search for someone to talk with.

"I didn't think you were married, Lieutenant," Marino said. "You don't look like a married man."

"No?" Marshall asked. "What do I look like?"

Marino peered at him and said hesitantly, groping to fit the words together into an inoffensive pattern. "Well," he said, "to me, Lieutenant, you look like the kind of guy that sits in expensive bars in the afternoon and talks to pretty women. You wear a flower in your lapel and a fancy handkerchief sticks out of your coat pocket. You are sitting there smoking a cigarette and drinking, maybe a Daiquiri or maybe a Manhattan, and you are saying things that make the pretty women laugh."

Marshall leaned back and laughed for a long time.

"But now you are wearing a uniform, so you don't have to make the pretty women laugh so hard before they will get into bed with you."

Marino's voice was solemn and hesitant and self-conscious over the

process of being analytical. "I used to work in a fancy hotel where the pretty women sat and laughed at the things guys like you said to them. I always asked myself: what are they laughing at? They wouldn't laugh if I said those things. Then I said, but you can't say those things, see, that's the difference."

"My wife," Marshall said, "is all brain and body and no heart in between. She has a figure that would stop a train on a dark night."

"Pardon me for asking, but don't you get along?" Marshall stared at him, and Marino averted his head. "It must be this—what are we drinking?—I shouldn't ask a personal question like that."

"Bourbon," Marshall said, thinking of Janyce, who sat in the coach ahead, reading a book. . . . His voice trailed and he looked now as if he had not been talking to Marino or anyone, but only sitting there alone, with weariness drawing his face together and bafflement large in the now not so steady eyes that looked back again to the far boundaries of old failures.

Marshall had finished the bourbon in the Dixie Cup and refilled it, and now that too was gone. He brushed the fluted edge of the cup with his thumb, looking ahead through the train window, beyond which he saw only the rushing darkness and the shadowy image of his own face. He slumped in his chair, setting the cup on the arm, telling himself that now he was really very drunk. He turned finally and stared at Marino, and his eyes contained a secret glitter as if many cupfuls of bourbon had opened a light vent. "Do you want to hear about my wife?" he asked.

Marino smiled with embarrassment. "Sure, Lieutenant. Anything you say."

"I don't like her," Marshall said heavily. He lurched forward, then steadied himself. "I love her, but I don't like her. You a married man?"

"You asked me that before," Marino said.

"I remember," Marshall said. "That's why you don't understand. You love a woman, and when you are away from her, you keep thinking about touching her, and the way she feels under your fingers. Me, I think about things like that all the time when I'm away from her because I forget I don't like her. I only think about how much I love her."

"It sounds complicated," Marino said softly.

Marshall grimaced and waved his hand, and then he bent down suddenly, remembering the quart of bourbon. It was empty. He dropped the bottle to the carpet. "That's the end of that," he said. "Lasted all the way from New York." He hunched around in his seat, leaning toward

Marino, who looked at him, seeing the bloodshot and pain of his eyes drawn together into an amalgam of unhappiness. "Let me tell you something, soldier," Marshall said. "You and me, we are just going to be names on monuments in the park. That's all, soldier, names on monuments. Do you know what I mean?"

Marino shrugged his shoulders tolerantly. "Me," he said, "I want to go home. I'll get off at the station and my old man will be there waiting for me."

"But no wife to eat your heart out," Marshall said.

"Just my old man."

Marshall regarded with silence the grave, swarthy face of the young man seated beside him and the artificial hand that rested stiffly in Marino's lap. "Where do you live?" he asked.

"A place called Grenley," Marino said. "I have never been there before. My old man bought this farm while I was overseas. I have never seen the place except for the pictures he sent me." He reached into his side pocket with his good hand and drew out an envelope of small snapshots and handed them to Marshall. "This is the first time we have ever owned anything. Before we lived in apartments in New York. Now we own a house, and land, and a barn, and my old man is his own boss. That is something to come home to. What do you think?"

"Yes," Marshall said in a strained voice as he began to look at the snapshots.

They were the kind taken with a box camera by someone who knew nothing of lighting or composition and sent to the drugstore to be developed at cut-rate prices. The figures and background were blurred and full of dark shadows, as if seen through a screen. They showed a house and a barn that looked as if they needed painting, and others showed an old man and a woman, singly or posed together. The man was grim and spare-bodied, and the woman resembled him. Marshall saw how they must have stood together, looking at the small box held in the hand of someone who cautioned them to remain motionless. He wondered at how they must have tried to look loving, and to smile, but the harsh unmanageable light had effaced all but the deep traceries of age on their faces. Marshall remembered these faces. They had looked out at him from the benches of the basement corridor of the hospital, waiting their turn at the clinic, holding the cards that admitted them. They were the faces of those who crowded the narrow streets of the city, of those who worked in the loft buildings, and of those who sat on steps during the

summer evening, replenishing their strength. Marshall handed back the snapshots.

"As long as I can remember," Marino told him, "my old man kept talking about the piece of land he was going to buy someday, and how he was going to be his own boss." His good hand searched his pockets slowly. "I got a letter he wrote to me right after he bought this place."

"I'd like to see it," Marshall said.

"It's in Italian, but I'll read it for you," Marino said, holding the creased envelope in his hand now. He drew out the single sheet of paper and started to read in a careful voice: " 'This is the first day we have been on the land we own. Now it is night. There will never be another day like this one in my life, no matter how long I live. I am sad only because you are not here on this first day. Many days are in the future, and I hope with all my heart that you and I will spend some of them here on our land before I die, and then I hope that you will spend them here with your children and your wife, when that day comes, so that everybody will know that when they pass this piece of land that the Marino family lives here and dies here, when the time comes, like respectable people. . . . The house is small, and it needs a new roof, but you and I will take care of this when you come back. The house does not have a heater, and we are looking for a coal stove until we have enough money to put in a regular heater. A lot of things have to be done, but I will work hard, and so will your mother, to fix everything up as nice as we can before you come home from this war. We wait for you to come back to us. Do not be sentimental about coming home because you are so far away. But kill the Fascist bastards as they killed my father and as they would kill you. . . .' " Marino stopped. "My old man is very bloodthirsty about Fascists," he said.

"Is there any more?" Marshall asked.

Marino shook his head. He refolded the letter and slid it back awkwardly into the envelope. "I'll have to get used to one hand," he apologized.

Marshall smiled. "Do you know that we are both getting off at the same station? You are going home and I am going to a party with cocktails and pretty women just like in the fancy hotels."

"You'll be able to meet my old man at the station," Marino said.

"I think I would like that," Marshall said.

Marino blushed with pleasure and then said seriously, "But no matter what you say, it must be nice to have a wife waiting for you when you

come home. Someday I would like to get myself a wife. Maybe this fight you are having with your wife will pass over and you'll have a good time at this party." Marino halted. "Lay the cards on the table. Tell her what is wrong."

Marshall smiled inwardly, listening to Marino's young solemn, confident voice. You could go back there now, he thought, where she is sitting and reading a book, and sit down, too, and say, "Baby, let's get untangled." (Remember when you called her Baby?) Say it quietly, earnestly, and wait with the quick fluttering of hope through the long silence while she smiled—because she would—and closed the book, her fingers marking the place. Then the smile on her mouth would go away (the scene hovered in his mind), and she would say, "Don't call me that. I don't like it."

Then it would be gone, ended, lost somewhere in the unyielding chill of her voice, the courage he'd summoned to forget the old failures; that hope nourished in the long moment between the smiling and the sound of her voice. And left in its place? Only once again the slow break of the heart.

"What has she got against you?" he heard Marino asking. "You look like a nice guy, a fancy guy, but a nice guy. Maybe she doesn't like you to drink bourbon out of a Dixie Cup?"

So you don't call her Baby, Marshall thought. Even if she once liked it. After all, it was only a name, a trifle evoked in his mind. So you start with something else, a grown man out to recapture the imagination of his wife; a grown man who has sat in many bars with many women. He smiled again at the way Marino had described him. "What did you say?" he asked Marino.

"Why don't you ask her what she has against you?"

Marshall did not reply. His mind pictured the past, and out of the bitter swirl of dissatisfactions, he saw again how he had come home for the first time. He had stood in front of her in the apartment, the epaulets giving his shoulders a squared broad look, bending over toward her; his fingers had grazed the elbow that rested on the arm of the chair with a kind of quiet, tactile hunger. He had waited with an anxious, grinning embarrassment for her to reach up and pull him down beside her in welcome.

"How do I look?" he'd asked. "Salty?"

That would have been the moment for her to have seen that only the

light of good memories showed in his eyes. A gesture, a word, a raising of the arms (Put down your cigarette and say you're glad to see me.)—any of these would have sufficed as a prelude to closeness. (Jesus, Janyce, don't sit there and smoke and look at me.)

So he'd finally sat down uninvited, and it was not what he had wanted in the beginning, all the way home on the train, riding in the cab, and coming up in the elevator. The distance had grown between them, and she let it grow, he remembered, until he thought: *all right, then the hell with you.*

And finally she had said, "Well, you look like an admiral or something. Even if all you are going to do is test reflexes and things like that." He remembered how he had sat there silently after she had said that and thought again: *then the hell with you.* But thinking also this time that failure could not be reshaped into success because he was lonely and happened to love his wife, who was set off from him in perfect isolation.

Marshall sat in the chair, unmartial, drunk, facing Marino and thinking of all the women of the world who could not hold love beyond sentimentality, beyond the beginning and the ease and simplicity of that time, and who spoiled things and then moved apart with hard-surfaced dignity and contempt. Coming home, he thought, had been like entering a darkened room in which all he had left lay intact and there in the darkness Janyce was sitting, the witchery of her flowing out toward him, and he could turn on the light and it would all be there. He could stand for a moment in the darkness, knowing it was all there, telling himself to go away, to turn and walk away, to break off love and remembrance that was there waiting for him to turn on the light, the bright light that would trap him again.

"What is it?" Marino asked sympathetically. "Don't you make a living?"

"I make a living, soldier. She could pile her canceled checks for the last ten years two feet high." Marshall leaned back in the chair with a lurching gesture, and sighed deeply, rubbing his face with his hands. He looked at Marino. His shoulders began to tremble.

"You don't look so good right now, Lieutenant," Marino said softly. He put his good hand on Marshall's arm. "If everything is so bad, the hell with it. What the hell is a dame like that?"

"Yes," Marshall said. His shoulders were still trembling. "A dame like that, soldier," he exclaimed in a hoarse voice, "a dame with a heart made out of sandpaper. I'll tell you something else, soldier," he said with an

air of imparting a deep secret, a final confession to which there would be no consoling reply, no comfort of any kind. "Someday," he said, "she is going to divorce me." He averted his head and stared hard at the green carpet. "That is going to kill me," he said. "That is going to be the last turn of the knife, soldier." He looked at the palms of his hands, which were covered with a film of sweat. "I lie awake at night, soldier, and I think about it after I have thought of everything else. I don't want to think about it," he murmured, "so I lie there while she sleeps and think of everything else to keep from thinking about that, and then I do." He raised his head and felt Marino's hand on his arm again. "Do you ever want to cry in bed at night, soldier?" he asked.

"Sure," Marino said. "Jesus Christ, Lieutenant, when I woke up in the hospital and I couldn't find my hand any more I cried for a week. Everybody wants to cry, Lieutenant."

Then Marino stopped trying to fill the silence and sat there, waiting for Marshall to stop trembling. He thought Marshall would never stop, but finally he did, and Marino felt himself relaxing out of the embarrassment that had filled him.

Later, when the train began to slow down, Marshall looked better; he looked as if he had been drinking, but now as if he could handle himself.

"How do you feel?" Marino asked.

"All right," Marshall said.

"You don't have to feel ashamed. Who the hell am I to feel ashamed in front of?" Marino said.

Marshall smiled wanly. "Thanks," he said.

The conductor came through the car, calling the station.

"This is it," Marino said.

They arose, and Marino brought down his bag.

"Would you like to meet my old man?" Marino asked.

"The two of you should be alone," Marshall said. He pressed his hands together and leaned against the back of a seat. "He didn't wait to see me. You don't want me." Marshall patted him on the shoulder and then they went to the door together. Marino descended the steps and Marshall called to him. Marino turned and smiled and started to wave. Marshall braced himself against the door. "Listen, soldier," he said. "Forget what I said about a name on a monument. You are not going to be one. Do you understand?"

Marino smiled. "Take it easy, Lieutenant," he called back.

"Believe me," Marshall said. "You will not be a name on a monument. I will be one, but not you. In fact, I will be a whole Goddamned monument myself."

Marino nodded, "O.K.," he said. "Take it easy."

Marshall watched from the narrow door and saw a dark-faced old man running across the platform toward Marino. He listened to them begin to talk and to laugh, and then he went back to the car where Janyce was trying to bring down their bags from the rack. The conductor came through, turning back seats, and he followed until he came to Janyce, and reached over her shoulders for the bags, bringing them down. The car was empty.

"You don't look as bad as I thought you would," she said.

Marshall took the bags and followed behind her, feeling inexpressibly elated and keeping silent so Janyce would not know.

On the platform Marshall looked for Marino, but he was gone, as he knew he would be. Then he heard someone greeting Janyce, and he followed her to the station wagon that waited for them. The driver started the motor and snapped on the headlights. Their brilliance made Marshall blink his eyes; the voices grew louder; he got into the back of the station wagon and began to recognize faces; then someone began to talk to him. For a long moment he could not answer, watching how the lights of the station shone on the platform as they drove away, feeling good, not caring what they were saying, and wishing now that he *had* gone to meet Marino's father, because he knew that soon he would surrender to the voices and to Janyce.

# SINGLE EXIT

by

Nelson Algren

"Lost, and by the wind grieved."—Thomas Wolfe

Katz, lying beside his wife, felt himself wakening and wondered vaguely about the stillness of the room; the familiar sounds of midnight were missing down the hall. And beneath the old-fashioned radiator no gas was hissing, though he recalled lighting it when the first chill of the evening had crept off the street into the room. He listened for the tapping of water in the sink, where a loose washer in the single faucet had kept up a faint and faithful all-night knocking, against the basin's cracked enamel, each night for many nights.

Heard, instead, a distant rustling behind the loosened paper of the wall, where a civilization of roaches wakened with each returning midnight; Katz felt oddly relieved at the sound. Had this midnight's generation, behind the faded and flowered paper, been the last? He decided, without reason, that by the time the housekeeper came in, with the roach sprayer in her hand for the midday fumigation, not a roach would be alive. After coming into this room, each day at noon for countless noons, with the same rusted and ineffectual sprayer, she would find not one alive to crawl blindly away. Tomorrow noon, somehow, the whole great frame hotel would be as spotless as it must have been on that forgotten morning when its doors were first opened, long before Katz had been born in another place. When the city itself was young.

No further sound or rumor of sound; neither Monday morning's first

express straining north around the Congress Street curve nor Sunday night's last local gathering speed for the run toward Roosevelt Road. No trolley moved, no cabman honked; no single voice called drunkenly up from the long bar below. But a slippered foot moved softly down the gas-lit hall; and down the long unlovely street: alone.

Katz rose and dressed by the filtered glare of the double-globed arc lamp shining baldly through the dark and tattered shade. Buttoning his topcoat, he was uneasily surprised to see that the baby, beside his wife, was wide awake and apparently had been watching his every move for some moments. There was an unpleasant, contemptuous kind of accusation in the child's eyes; but it made no outcry, and he pulled his worn lapels up around his neck as though unconcerned by its unwavering regard. Because the child felt ashamed of the cheap green felt of its father's lapels? Because all the coat's buttons but the top one were off and that one hanging? Like his respectability; by a single thread.

But where Katz was going respectability was suspect. For everyone there, without exception, would be striving, above all else, to be eminently respectable. So that all would be suspect there.

"And they better respect me too," he warned them all beforehand. "I still pay my own way."

He walked down endless flights, turning at last into the hotel entrance to the bar. Juke music funneled out through the entrance in a roaring bass, beating out *Blues in the Night* in a vocal that rang hoarsely, like a manacled madman's voice full of hoarse glee at his own pain. Beneath it, standing in the doorway, Katz heard the fast and slippered shuffle of the same shoes he had heard whispering so lonesomely away, down an uncarpeted hall and out onto a lonesome street. A soft-shoe shuffle! Would there be applause to greet him? And many friends? He brushed down his coat and hurried in. As the juke died out on a troubled whine.

The dancers all had gone. The singers all were still. There was no one but a sweatered fellow placing chairs along the bar.

Katz stood shifting restlessly from one foot to the other, trying to down his disappointment at forever, all his life, arriving just a moment too late for everything.

"Closing up?" he asked diffidently.

The fellow moved on toward the back without answering, drawing chairs soundlessly across the floor, tossing them slowly, without effort, along the bar, so that no matter how carelessly he moved, they fell, softly, into neat rows; and stayed so strangely motionless, all along the bar.

Above the bar mirror a neon kitten flashed two suggestions off and on, in bright and blood-red steel:

GET UP A PARTY
FEED THE KITTY
GET UP A PARTY
FEED THE KITTY

At the corner table, undisturbed by the bouncer, Katz saw a woman sitting with her head pillowed in her hands. He walked an endless aisle toward her, between the tables and the bar; a way that went, forever narrowing, toward a single far-off sign:

THIS WAY OUT

A faded trinket of a hat, soiled by a decade of free beers and fifty-cent love, bought at some bargain counter for some forgotten Easter, lay beneath her hand. He felt she had been waiting there for him, with a rising desperation, as though he alone, of all the people wandering the earth, could bring news of new hope.

A beer, long gone flat, waited for him beside the hat. Beneath it, stained in a circle by the glass's bottom, lay a yellow streetcar transfer, folded as though containing a personal message. He slipped it out cautiously, without moving the glass, planning secretly to himself to read some intimate knowledge of her upon it. It had been punched out going south on State: November 11, 1931.

"I'm Jerry the Greek," Katz told her for some reason not clear to himself, but just to say something important in order to dismiss the transfer's date from his mind. "I was in the big fella's corner against Gibbons at Butte. Lord, them days in the West. The old mining camps. Fred Fulton. Gunboat Smith. Willy Mehane. Beat 'em all but Mehane. The big fella was stronger in the West. The East took his strength. In the old days he coulda beat five Tunneys. Them days. The Old West."

Katz had never seen the Old West, yet felt homesick for it now. " 'By the banks of Red River,' " he hummed nostalgically, " 'Where seldom if ever——' "

She looked up. A dark woman with a tarnished dime-store locket dangling lopsidedly down her throat into the hollow between her breasts. Looking at him too steadily and with no word, she snapped the locket open. Katz saw, within a tiny mirror there, his own reflection, scarred by years of furtive living in rented rooms and secret corners. Of

waiting too long, behind too many doors, for too many friends who never knocked. His own face, a young man's face; yet strangely aged. A face made weakly fierce by daily failures, as only the faces of those who fail, always, every day, knowing their failure in full beforehand, become weakly fierce. A face full of a morbid vanity, and for a mouth, a brand: a single relentless line fashioned so by suspicion: of all other men toward himself, of himself toward all others. Days of false humility and nights of bitter treachery were in that lean and sallow face.

It was also the face of one who has striven, a full lifetime, to be always more abject than the landlord, than the housekeeper, than the grocer, than the bartender, than the dance-hall hostess and the pool-hall houseman, in order to gain an extra drink, or have the rent put off for a day, or to play a free round of rotation.

It was also the face of one who had had to keep his own heart pressed relentlessly within him, lest it, catching him unaware, give an advantage to another and leave him without the free drink, the free game, or the sorely needed extra day.

The woman snapped it shut, like closing Katz's life with a snap, and he felt old and done in for good. A nameless regret choked him for a moment. What right had she, who had been in a thousand corners with a thousand men, to reproach him? His vindictiveness, aroused by the reflection of his face, rose in his throat till he felt a need of striking out blindly at her. He fondled the faded flowers of her hat idly, and she followed his fingers with her eyes. "Them flowers been beat out pretty long," she acknowledged apologetically.

"You're a beat-out flower yourself," Katz told her brutally.

She smiled, with frank acknowledgment. "And for just as long, friend. Don't rub it in." She tapped his hand familiarly, and her touch was cold and friendless; as though she wore surgeon's gloves. "Sweety-Dear, buy me a beer, I'm on my final uppers."

She lifted the sole of her foot, to show she wore a pair of policeman's rubbers, some station-house castoffs, the sole worn to the ball of the naked foot. A line of dirt encircled the naked ankle like a thin relentless chain.

"Why should I buy you anything?" Katz asked her. "I don't even know you. I think you're one of them kind."

"What kind?" she asked curiously.

"Oh, you know. Them that figure the worse they look the easier they'll make it."

"That ain't fair, Honey-Hush. I'm a beat-out flower for true."

She looked at him steadily, without shame, for a long moment, so that he wanted to return her touch to show he truly believed her. But her fingers were so cold, the place was so drafty, and out on the street the rain began.

She lowered her eyes and added, half to herself, reminiscently, "I used t' be a keeno blonde." As though that explained all things, the station-house castoffs and the well of her despair. And pointed a wavering finger, for verification, at the matted bangs of her forehead, curled school-girl fashion. "You could believe *that* much, I should think," she reproached him. "I ain't cost you a cryin' dime." He saw what she meant. It was coming out black at the roots. She turned her head; toward the nape of the neck the hair was still streaked faintly blonde.

"Is there another room?" Katz asked with feigned innocence, pretending he himself didn't know a single trick. He needed, badly, to trick her off in some fashion in which, all her days, she had never been tricked off before. A sly devil she was, he could see. Else why had she kept the transfer so long?

As though sharing an obscene secret with him, she nodded knowingly, touching her lips to indicate he had spoken too loudly.

"There's a *certain* room, Honey-Hush," she told him with cunning equal to his own. "But there ain't no key, Honey-Hush. My roommate makes off she don't know what she's doin' but she keeps the door open 'n' some date walks right in without knockin'. He pertends it's a accident, he was lookin' for another room, 'n' she makes off she wasn't expectin' comp'ny. They tell each other that, the devils. But she knows what she's up to awright, she losed the key apurpose. They all lose their keys apurpose. They all know what they're doin'." She eyed him slyly. "Just a small beer, Sweet-Dear, then I'll go."

"They really *don't* know what they're doing, though," Katz assured her. "None of us do." Katz leaned forward and spoke confidentially. "None of us knows what we're doing. Not one. Do you know I have nothing on under this coat?" He stood up and, as it fell open, stood smiling at his own nakedness.

"It's nothin' t' grin about, I don't see," she upbraided him. "Close up yer clothes 'n' buy me a beer. Behave yerself, Honey-Hush."

He sat down, folding the coat modestly about him, explaining earnestly, "I wasn't smiling at myself really. I was smiling at the simple wretchedness of everyone with nothing to wear but some sort of castoff rag or

other. Who must try, night and day, to appear nearer to complete nakedness than the next beggar. For those to whom pride is a luxury. For those who sleep nightly with shame. All their lives; as with an unfaithful wife. Always accusing, always being accused; yet never speaking an accusing word. Every night."

She rose, deeply hurt, turned on her heel haughtily, and walked swiftly through the side door. He heard the slippered whispering of the oversize rubbers retreating down Harrison Street, shuffling somehow stealthily, like a dancer's feet. Till the sound was swallowed in a long silence, like an endless tunnel's silence; as though Harrison Street were a slanting pit to nowhere, all night long. A single darkening one-way aisle, all unlit.

Katz wiped his forehead with his coat sleeve. He was perspiring and felt half drunk, as in fever. He stood up and ordered the lights to be turned on over the door, the floor show to begin, and someone to bring him the best in the house. But he could not hear his own voice, and toward the single exit at the back the same fellow moved on endlessly, tossing the same endless chairs softly along an endless bar. Above the bar mirror the neon kitten blurred indistinctly, turning from red to a flickering amber: staring without understanding at the arc lamp's light through the tattered shade, he heard the faint and faithful tapping of the faucet against the cracked enamel of the sink.

His wife's hand lay familiarly across his own.

The radiator began hissing, making a thumping as the heat strove to drive the chill night air out of the coils, and beside him the baby was uncovered and crying wretchedly with cold.

Katz withdrew his hand from his wife's touch, covered the child, and lay back feeling like a pursued thief with a bad heart who has raced up many flights and sits back on his own bed at last, counting his own heartbeats in a sickening fear that the next may not come at all. Listening thus to his swollen and wild heart, still filled with a fear of an imminent and nameless disaster, he clasped his sweating hands together as though, by clenching them, his heart could be quieted in time.

In time for what? He had all the night and all the day and countless nights and countless days before him—how could he get through them all?

As his heart stilled a little he felt a slow realization, after many such days and nights, of the place where all his years in the city had brought him. The tapping in the sink began sounding like some forgotten knocker at a distant door, tapping timidly, all night, at a room like this

small room. Like this small room, which held nothing for any knocker, whether the door would be opened for him or shut forever in his face. It was all one, open or shut. There was no one, nothing in the place for any knocker, any night. Nothing to see and nothing to hold; nothing to claim and nothing to believe. No familiar human face to give fresh hope or final refuge. Neither love, nor peace, nor help for weariness. It would be better for any such knocker to stand waiting in an unlit hall all his days, believing vaguely in something a little, than to enter once and learn, in a single sinking moment, that he was no less lost within it.

Beneath the covers his wife's hands groped blindly for his own, in sleep. Her fingers felt cold and friendless. Half rising, he studied her shut and dreaming eyes: she lay with lips half parted, as in wonder at some dream, like his own, that went careening through the troubled city of her mind. The eyes were shut and shadowed, the full breasts rose and fell. He drew away from her and lay back stiffly, trying not to waken her.

Lying stiffly on the flat of his back and staring straight up at the ceiling's flickering reflections, he felt numbed by the night: it was as though, whether in sleep or waking, each night betrayed each day. As though every waking moment betrayed each separate dream. As all his dreams were, always, devilish deceptions of his daytime hopes. That his life, like all lives, whether lived in frame hotels or suburban mansions or on lonely country farms, was a betrayal repeated casually, without reason or malice, with each returning noon.

That the woman beside him, like any woman in any bed beside any man, betrayed him, casually, without reason or malice, with her every breath. Asleep, in fever or in waking. Walking the city's cageworked streets, window-shopping on any afternoon; or caught deep in the coils of any casual dream.

That no man, that no woman, had betrayed him more irretrievably, with less reason, with so little malice, than he had, from the beginning, betrayed himself.

That the sleeping infant slept on only to gather strength, through pointless pain endured through a thousand futile afternoons, in order to take its own mechanical turn at the business of betraying Katz. To gather strength: all things gathered strength, struggled and jostled and cheated and lied, all to achieve some such mechanical betrayal of someone near and dear; on some rainy midnight twenty or forty years away.

And yet—to no purpose, for no measurable gain. To satisfy no ire, appease no stronger will. Only, like a man tossing dice idly by himself,

finding simple chance, that could as easily make him win as lose, turning the dice always toward defeat.

That no man, anywhere, in any far-off place or behind the nearest hired partition, could live a single day and be dealt with without hire. Should all others happen to pass Katz by, Katz reflected, in the business of betrayal—as being too small, too mean, and too humble to deceive—then he himself, as in the certain order of things, would undo himself utterly at last. As he had already undone himself. In all things, toward all others, utterly.

Katz's fevered fingers touched his lips as though he were cautioning another to be still. The lips felt parched and bitten raw; he felt them moving soundlessly, without effort on his part. And followed their words falteringly with his fingers, like an aging blind man reading a young man's lips; and heard.

There, manacled by night, he was trying, in the dark desperately, to curse: his own humanity.

# REFUGEE

by

Ellen Nielsen

Raising herself on her elbow she caught the last shaft of moonlight from the window and peered at her watch. Twenty after twelve. The little silver hands gleamed sharp as needles, and the miniature ticking when she held the watch to her ear (maybe it had stopped!) was the only sound in the world. The great, dark, silent world of night, and she the only one awake in it. If only spring would come, then there would be birds soon, leaves stirring and small winds. Winter, she thought, staring into the emptiness of the window, is black ice.

How could Carl sleep so close beside her and she awake? He was folded away in sleep as remote and merciless as the ticking of her watch behind its bland crystal. She stirred fretfully, resenting Carl's warm, insensate body removed from her by so many leagues of sleep. Tentatively she touched her foot to his, feeling the small bones of his foot, the sharp, protruding ankle . . . such good little feet, she had always said, but now they, too, were gone in sleep, apart, not feeling her touch. Sleep had wrapped him safely away, divided them, made them separate. If she should whisper, "Carl" he would turn at once, of course, blink up at her, reach for her anxiously, and say . . .

No, she must not waken him again, it distressed him to keep repeating what he always said: "But you're so much better, dear; you're back home with me, safe with me." His letters to her in the hospital had been like that, promising her safety, a safety she had no need of since her fear had never been defined, could not be confined to fit any formula. He had promised rashly a reasonable safety to a reasonable fear. They were all like that, the doctors, too. "Is it this? Is it that?" Her answer seemed to

her lucid and revealing, the passionate, painstaking language of the young child: "I'm *afraid!*"

In the hospital she had even slept. Carl, she wanted to say, you can't even promise me sleep.

Lifting her head she stared into the room, but its objects were too familiar, too cluttered and close, and, wearied, she sank back to the pillow, feeling tears sting her eyes. I was never so alone in the hospital as I am here beside you, Carl, she wanted to say, so that he would deny it, vehemently reassure her, his voice loud and clear in the night.

Must she go through life with this nameless fear upon her, this struggle with decision? Would the time come again when she would stand shivering in her slip, holding two dresses in her hands, and find it utterly impossible to decide which to wear and end her struggle on the bed in a frenzy of weeping and despair? Would Carl again, patiently, times without number, make her small decisions for her, not realizing that indecision was at the very core of her life only infrequently formulating itself about an object?

She almost woke Carl to ask, "Do you remember . . . ?" But too quickly she remembered what came after, and knew that Carl would remember too. The long dark nights when he got up and walked with her through the silent, shut house, turning on the lights, finding a station on the radio to break the quiet that she couldn't bear, telling her that soon, in another hour, in two hours, it would be light again, day would have come. That was their honeymoon! That was the new marriage hardly begun after the divorce hardly ended; the sensible, easy, civilized divorce. "Good-by, then, Dick." "S'long, Charlotte, good luck," and in the mirror she had seen him finger the knot in his tie while he eyed the lawyer's red-haired secretary. But in the elevator, going down, Carl had come on at the seventeenth floor, a little heavier, taller somehow, darker, since college; a bulwark. It had been as easy as that, as simply inevitable. No need for the doctors to probe and prod *there* or mutter, *ah!* It had been like coming home after a dance, after traveling, after the theater; it had, indeed, been like going down in an elevator instead of going up. It was all too easy. You could live on the main floor as well as the roof, it didn't matter, it had no significance. A dwelling place was changed as easily as a dress; to be civilized was to be fluid, adaptable, urbane. Goodness knows she was no prude (not after Dick!), but some Puritan marrow in her had been violated.

No sudden change had taken place, only fear and indecision mounting

against her will, against her reason, *for no reason* . . . until the day she had called Carl at the office and he had come home at once just as she was coming out on the porch, her coat over her bathrobe, her feet bare.

So the doctor had come. Carl had been as bewildered as she; packing her bag, he had alternated between hope and despair. "The hospital's the thing, darling; they'll build you up; here, you'll want these, too," he had said, picking up her red satin mules. And suddenly his face had clouded with pain and he had bent to kiss her (the mules still in his hand) angrily at first, then with a sort of sad, unwilling renunciation.

Incredible that she had ever been afraid of the hospital, dodging it for so long, finding loopholes of escape. How trapped she had felt that day when Carl and the doctor had left her there in the high, cold room! But how clever they had been to begin the examinations at once! Even yet she could hear the soft roll of the wheel chair coming up the corridor for her; the first time it had stopped at her door she had been filled with panic. Now it had come, there was no escape. They would pry her loose from her body; not even Carl could save her now. But she had docilely allowed herself to be helped into the chair, wrapped cozily around with the gray hospital blanket, and swiftly, almost gaily, the attendant in his crisp white uniform with the blue jacket had trundled her down the corridors, the chair rolling a little to one side like a dog running.

They poked and peered into your body, but you were left safe and untouched. The fear was in that, too; what if they couldn't find *you?* You shed your sick and ailing body, your troublesome body, into their hands. What was that saying from the Bible? "Deliver me from the body of this death"? But her body had not been sick and ailing; it had been long and slender, with the sheen of vitality upon it. Deliver *me,* she had cried, *get me out of here.* Instantly the doctors had hushed her, misconstruing her words. This is a nice place, they had told her, lots of people . . .

When all the tests were over she had felt freed, cast up on her high bed as on a shore after shipwreck. It had been a wonderful feeling never before experienced, yet not wholly strange. When she had been little, holding tight to her father's hand, and he had caught her up in his arms, where she had been safe from some danger . . . ? No, not quite that, either, for her father had accomplished that for her. But there in the hospital, after the tests were over, she had come through. That was it! Hating them, fearing them, yet she had submitted to them, had endured all the queer things done to her.

To get back to that, she thought, raising herself again on her elbow and groping for her watch. To be single and whole again like that, inviolable.

One o'clock. This was the time the night nurse padded down the corridor, turning her flashlight into each room. She had not often been awake; sometimes she had just slipped over the edge of sleep, hearing the steps come nearer, as in a dream, visioning the long, empty, shining corridor, and watched (coming out of her sleep for a moment) through her lashes the thrust of light coming into the room, the nurse's quick appraising glance, her white uniform gray in the dark hallway. Then sudden darkness, the uniform blacked out and the footsteps echoing away again. She would be asleep before nurse came back down the other side of the hall. Once or twice, in the early days just after her admittance, she had not been asleep and had stared wide-eyed, alert, into the spray of light from the nurse's hand. Then the nurse had paused, staring back for a moment, had clicked off the light and come into the room. "Not sleeping?"

Oh, wonderful hospital where someone was always awake when you were awake, sick when you were sick. And the nurse, without a word, would bring her a glass of water, raise the window a trifle, brisk, quiet, matter-of-fact, making of somber night a noonday commonplace.

The beautiful, sudden light in the morning when another nurse rolled up the blinds, started the water in the tub, and, leaving a stack of clean towels on the bed, said, "Fifteen minutes today, Mrs. Wilson." Even her bath was arranged for her. She had only to lie in it for the time designated and blankly survey the gleaming lavender walls and listen to the soft hiss and rattle of steam in the pipes.

The day, the whole day, was scheduled for her. After her bath she would put on her bathrobe and sit in the one chair by the window until her tray came. The coffee would be hot in the little silver coffeepot; under a heavy silver cover butter would be melting into the toast. All along the corridors trays would be clinking, rolled along on rubber-tired wagons. Sometimes, before she quite finished eating, the cleaning woman would come with pail and little basket of cleaning implements, brisk, impersonal, but friendly. They were separate worlds, not touching, leaving each other lightly, without memory. All down the corridor the cleaning woman, room by room, quickly and efficiently did her work, picked up the soiled towels and left; no lapping over, no shreds of unfinished business.

After her breakfast she was allowed ten minutes for strolling in the corridor; later, when she was stronger, they let her walk about the hospital grounds. She liked standing at the double doors, looking out to the veranda at the end of the hall. Back of the glass the doors were enscrolled in wrought iron. The day that she discovered that they were really bars she found also that her windows would open only so far, no more than the width of a hand. The idea did not shock her; she welcomed it. (Because, you see, I'm not crazy.) Imprisoned, she felt more than ever free. The precautions did not so much keep her in as keep the world out. Looking through the doors she pitied the hurrying people, the snarl and tangle of traffic at the corner. She did not stand there very long. Sometimes another patient would be shuffling up and down the hall, they would walk together then, like promenading a deck, their talk fragmentary, easily begun, easily terminated.

When she got back to her room the bed had been freshly made, the covers turned back in a triangle, the sheets smooth, smelling of disinfectant. Quickly, already tired, she would undress and crawl into the chill, fresh bed. Here, for a while, she looked at her nails minutely, carefully, explored all the cool corners of the bed with her toes, looked blankly at the walls and bare dresser, and dozed off in a half sleep. No more examinations, nothing left to examine, her was not hers any more, it had ceased to harry her, she was done with it. Bit by bit it had been catalogued and filed for the doctors to haggle over; it was for the doctors to interpret its signs or lack of signs; let them make of it what they would, she was done with it.

At two Carl came. No other visitors were allowed and sometimes, for some strange reason or other, not even he was allowed. The first days she had begged him to stay. "Don't go, don't go yet, come tomorrow for sure." And he had been reluctant to go, turning always, at the door, to look back once more, a strange, helpless look in his eyes. But later it was different. He filled her with distress and weariness. He brought the world with him into her austere, empty world; he reminded her, by his very appearance, the tailored shirts, the matching ties and socks, the successful and cautious office garb, that life lay outside, waiting to attack and be attacked. He had had a hard time finding a parking place and would come in late and rushed. Just as he had slipped into a stall, he said, he noticed the sign FOR DOCTORS ONLY and he had had to back out again. She could have cried with the effort of it. She heard the sound of the motor starting, stopping, horns warning him, the rasp of brakes, and

saw his eyes, worried, calculating on the hurrying, fussy little clock in the dashboard. She wanted to reach out her hand and say, "Never mind. Don't bother. Don't come."

What if she should wake him now and say, "Carl, I want to go back, I'm tired"?

Hastily, before she should do so, she slipped out of bed (tucking the bedclothes carefully back around Carl), groped for her robe and slippers, and went down the stairs.

The living room was snug and warm. The flames from the fireplace sent wavering shadows tumbling across the walls and ceiling; the room glowed red. From his basket in the corner the cat gave a faint miaow and, stepping daintily over the edge, advanced with dignity and pleasure to meet her. In the firelight his eyes were like wet olives. He began purring in a frenzy of delight, rubbing back and forth against her legs where she stood warming herself by the fire. He looked up at her and miaowed soundlessly.

Bringing a robe from the davenport she spread it in front of the fireplace and curled up on it in almost as tight a ball as the cat. The flames sent their warmth up and down her back, and the cat burrowed into the curve of her arm in an ecstasy of comfort. His claws shot lazily in and out of his furry paws, and through half-opened eyes he seemed to observe her humorously. Beyond the windows the night was dark, fathomless. Butting her head into the cat's soft belly she began to cry against his dry, corn-mealy, sweet-smelling fur. His purring grew louder as her head weighed against his body and presently, with a quiet, graceful movement, he reached up with one paw and pushed her gently away.

Two Excerpts from

# THE FREE AND THE LONELY

by

Leonard Ehrlich

## I. AS WITH AN OBOE WILDNESS

*(Place: The Adirondacks*
*Time: The early 1920's)*

He sat there in the night-quiet room. From the tenacious traceries of his mind he was writing down the first movement, the *maestoso,* complete to its finest detail. (Thirl, with his unresting intelligence, observing the faculties of composers, had often thus reflected: how wonderful the human brain, to conceive and work out a design and structure drawn from a veritable wilderness of sound; to consummate it not only in its bare singing line but multivoiced and complete harmonically and with a thousand involvements of balance and instrumental color—and all this solely within the skull itself, sometimes without the hand or breath sounding even once an instrument's actual note! But Broome sat in the night-quiet chamber mechanically writing down the music he had already fulfilled and was now but remembering; hardly more conscious of himself or of his labor's mystery than the bead-headed spider he had watched in the cabin spinning cables of death-cunning delicacy from out of its exhaustless belly.) Complete to the finest detail—when suddenly in a hornsoft distance he heard the phrase which earlier had

eluded him. Again it was only an intimation, but whereas before he had been uncertain, now he was sure it was potential for him. So at once he took up the tattered notebook, and quickly while he was warm with it and felt its force he sketched it out, skeletonlike.

He had learned this long ago: often when he was tired or unexpectedly distracted a phrase might disappear as swiftly as it had sprung; it fell back into the silence from which it had come, and no effort of the will or the imagination could regain it, it was forever lost. . . . Now he put the notebook back in the drawer (such seeds grow also with time, nurtured in their soil by the blood-swept heart, by the springs and minerals of the brain; or else they are stillborn—you could only wait) and resumed the labor of transcribing the *maestoso*. Yet even as he worked his innermost thought continued to dwell with the fugitive sounds.

He was about to turn off the lamp when he happened to look toward the open window. Just beyond there was a white pine and the light from the room was streaming out faintly upon it. A wind had come up; the boughs and long slender tufts gleamed and strained forward in the wind like the ghosts of hounds.

The house was quiet. Surely at this hour they must all be sleeping.

Standing in the dark by the open window he could hear how silent the night was in the mountains. There was a mist moving restlessly in the trees along the edge of the field. The sky was filled with tiny dim stars, but they gave no light, the whole sky was a livid sweep of darkness and the valley was dark.

I am in the house of the Macphersons. They sleep, and on their pillows the heads are tawny-fair, save the child's. Robert is slow to the eye; the narrow bronze-tasseled head weaving its shadowy thought slowly nods, his long full limbs stir almost tranced, stasislike (yet the flame is too quick, in sudden moments we have come upon him we have seen fate burning on his anguished brow). The sun accompanies Erda, it runs upon her hair. Blue and gold-flecked light moves lucidly depth on depth through her eyes; my own rejoice to follow her. She is the sane the shining day, breathing of an earth candid and fresh at morning, whence her name is taken. After the first few days he was no longer conscious of the limp and faint drag of her right foot. Of the three children, the two golden ones danced, they flourished; Emmy gently, Walt in wildness. The third was dark. She was ten.

This dark child fascinated him. She kept him off; already, so young, she would fiercely guard the precincts of her dawning self. "There is no

use forcing her," Erda once said to him; "she comes to me in her own time." She rarely cried. When she sorrowed or was punished she would go up alone to her room; or she would brood in the garden, if it was in flower. He felt a vague kinship with her ways; he too had some stubbornness of the soul, in which every impulse must be nursed, or chastened. The knowledge of it moved him strangely. He knew that of the three this was the child he would cherish.

It was in the beginning. He came into the room. Thirl was seated by the terrace window, fixing a new string to the cello, and Maria stood by him, intently watching. Miss Blekely was reading the newspaper, but her eyes would suddenly look up severe, attentive, to observe the child. She did this twice as he came quietly across the long ample room. "Thirl, are we going to play again tonight?" Maria was saying, and Broome was struck by the question, for though she was studying the piano and had the gift, of course she did not join them in ensemble, but only listened—he recognized that whatever she was witness to and could understand at all, then she made it hers, drawing it transformed according to her need into her tremulous life. Are we going to play again tonight?

"Yes, and pay special heed," Thirl said, the strong knobby fingers that had cut in mercy so much stricken human flesh sliding up along the gut; "for it will be new music." His beard as he bent there against the deep glowing wood of the instrument was purest white, but little wisps of it, untrimmed curling strands, shone out like sparks and silvery filaments of light in the brilliance of the late sun falling slowly behind him.

"And will you play Father's too?" she half pled and half was imperious; but she saw Broome and at once he noticed the change in her, something vigilant, reckoning, as if she had not placed him yet in the hierarchy of her fiery little universe. But he knew she was ready to resent him. So his own perversity stirred and for an instant he was no less a child than she: he was not sure whether he wanted to bait or win her.

"Yes," said Thirl, looking up at Broome, "your father's too"; and the younger man heard the subdued and ruthful note that crept into the other's voice.

"Do you want to walk a bit, Thirl?" he asked.

"Oh, but, Thirl," the child said, "you haven't finished with the strings. Please finish with the strings."

"Don't fret, child. There's only the G."

"But it must be finished for tonight. We have to play Father's new music."

"Everything will be ready," he said, tightening the peg, plucking at the string. "You see, Maria, I'd put down anything to speak to a man. I'd put down the best score, or the best book, or the best anything, to speak to a man . . . or even a woman," he added, looking at the governess, his lake-gray eyes narrowed and glancing with points of light.

Hmm—she flushed, and tossed her head, as if to say, it's best to be sure she wants speaking to. She was not really angry; Thirl had a way with her. Nevertheless, she appeared constantly to be engaged in a subtle little struggle with others; it was almost the atmosphere of her being. Perhaps it was her way of getting back at things; she was desolate, drying up, and she knew it. Yet sometimes her wide ashen mouth would yield a little, and then something lovely appeared on her face, she was a girl. How old can she be, Broome wondered.

"Mrs. Macpherson has asked me to show you the cabin," she said in that precise immaculate speech of hers, chin and shiny nose held high. (But she could not keep out the dry faint rasp and hollow deadness that often encroaches gradually upon the voices of virgins as their lives draw on.) "If you have time, Mr. Broome, I should like to go now."

"Fine," he said. "Will you come along, Thirl?"

The little girl's eyes darkened and glowered with held-in excitement; she stood there rigid, expectant as a listening young crow. "No," the old man said, "as long as you have company I'll dig around here," and his clean white-cuffed hand went over the cello's bosom. Miss Blekely was putting on her coat in the hallway and Broome was going out to join her when he heard behind him the child crying out in her small piercing voice, "Miss Blekely, may I go too?"

That was her way. She was so intent, so alive, she had to be in on things, or else she suffered; and yet where people were concerned she had a strange reticence and uncertainty in her soul that made her hang back. The eagerness would take hold of her, you could see it rush into her black round eyes, but she would stay still. Then, at the very last, when to be silent or unmoving another instant would leave her forsaken, she would suddenly rush forth or cry aloud, almost wildly. When she was thus excited her thin little throat would swell.

"Yes," Miss Blekely said. "But you will not run, you will go along quietly."

"Maria, are you going to leave me?" asked Thirl.

"Oh, but I'll be back," said the child. "Please wait here, Thirl. You'll see, I'll come back."

"Go along," he said, smiling, fluffing out his silky beard. "Go along, my darling."

"Really, sir," she said with the utmost seriousness, "there's nobody I'm *fonder* of than you," and she came darting out to them in the hallway.

They went down the long slope path toward the lake. "You may not like the cabin," Miss Blekely said. The child was following a little behind them; she looked very odd, very tiny in her loose maroon cape, her black eyes perpetually searching beneath the wide tan sailor. "Later there will be wasps," the governess said. "How they ever got into the cabin I'm sure I don't know."

"When I was in Mexico," he said, "the Indians used to make a wasp stew." He was surprised as he said this, for he had never been in Mexico. Yet he was pleased with himself.

"How strange!" she said. "We spent a summer in Mexico. We did not come across such a custom." She looked at him obliquely. "Well," she said, "education is no remedy for barbarism in the soul"; and he wondered exactly what she meant, and whatever it was whether she meant him or the wasp eaters. "I hope the boats on the lake won't disturb you, later. There are two at the other end. They sometimes drone."

"Nothing disturbs me," he said, "only music. I hope there won't be any organ-grinders around . . . later."

The valley was cradlelike, the fields and broad-backed hills still winter-darkened, though April was already here. Far in the south the mountains rose. They were often obscured, but on clear days you could see them dark blue and purple; they were covered with pine and hemlock forests. It would be a late spring, they said; they had not heard the finches yet. There was still some ice in the meadow; great chunks of it were melted away at the bottom save for a slender stemlike base, and the tops were heavy and umbrella-shaped, so that rising there in thawing fields they looked like enormous frozen fungi. Farther in the woods the deep-cupped crotches of some of the big oaks still carried a white burden; on sharp nights the snow glistened in the oaks. (In the dark by the window, listening to the hush and the leaf-beseeching whisper out of the throat of the mountain darkness, he seems to see the snow gleaming now, but it is only fancy, it has been gone for weeks.) He had a room on

the second floor, the sun rose upon it. The house is wisely built, Robert explained, and he said this with an unconscious pride because his father had built the house sixty years before, his father had pitched in with his own hands, though he owned railroads and was then rich; he had been a man who loved to use his hands, but Robert was helpless that way, he had no sense for it. In the summer, he said, the elms would interrupt the full flooding glare of the sun, and the light would be softened and suffused; while behind the house on the north the giant oaks broke the strength of the wind that came down from the summit close above them. The wind had many sounds and Broome was learning. Firs are bass, they have close-set needles and the note is grave. Pines sing higher, sibilant, since the stems are supple. And balsams hum.

"I trust the piano will suit you, Mr. Broome. It was recently tuned."

"Good. But I hardly use it."

"I thought composers constantly use the piano," she rebuked him.

"Not too much—when they compose."

"Robert Macpherson uses it constantly."

The little girl was following behind them. She was impatient for them to get on, but still she hung back. And all the time her eyes were busy. She would stop to observe the husk of an acorn along the path or some furtive movement in amongst the yellow- and green-lichened stones of the row—then breathlessly she would come rushing along as if in dread of missing something; the way a cat might follow, halting, staring intently, then scampering up in a rush alongside your leg.

"I'm sure Macpherson doesn't use it as much as you think," he said. "He's too good a composer."

Her thin face flushed, with pride, yet somehow with resentment, that the other should say it.

"The fingers get to be master," he said. "Do you know Berlioz?"

"Of course," she said coldly.

"Well, he could scarcely play a note on the piano. His father wanted him to be a doctor and he was afraid that if Berlioz learned the piano he would get too deep in music. As a kid he could play a lot of instruments. Flute, guitar. The flageolet. Even drums. But he was kept away from the piano, and somehow he never learned. But he was a great composer."

"Ah," she said triumphantly. "Then he *could* play."

"Yes, but not the piano. We were talking of composing at the piano. There's no danger in the flute. And drums are great training—you

know, pitch, sharpens the sense, but hell, I don't suppose anybody ever dug a theme out on the drums. But too much piano is dangerous."

"Why?"

"Well . . ." He was at a loss. Moreover, he was surprised to find himself even trying to explain. You just knew things of that kind, you didn't talk about them. There was too much talking about music. But somehow he wanted very much to explain this point to her. It suddenly seemed important that he should explain it.

"You see," he said slowly, biting his lip as he struggled to get at his thought, "when you compose at the piano . . . you begin to . . . to let your fingers find your ideas. Instead of, oh, instead of letting the ideas find you."

A tiny light showed in her eyes, but she did not relax her unbelieving lips. He remembered a story Thirl had once told him, about Meyerbeer: how the fellow used to take three flats in a house, and he would live in the middle one, so that no one above or below him would hear him ferreting his music out of the piano, cooking it up. He repeated the story for Miss Blekely. Hmm, her haughty tossing head wordlessly uttered.

"I do not think Berlioz was a great composer," she said finally.

But he knew that she had really been interested. And he knew that this interest was somehow bound up with Robert Macpherson; he remembered her face as they had danced in the kitchen.

Small birds were scratching around like mice in the scrubby underbrush, they were scolding and cheeping. "What is a flageolet?" said Maria behind them. One of the little birds flitted up to the top of a bush, which quivered and swayed under it, and the bird broke into a sweet high whistle.

"It's one of the grandfathers of the flute," he said, watching the bird. "We don't use them nowadays."

"Why don't we use them nowadays?"

"Because they sound pretty tinny. What kind of bird is that?"

"Why . . . that's a whitethroat. Don't you know that's a whitethroat?"

"Maria," said Miss Blekely, "this is no occasion for rudeness."

A crowd of crows were strutting and flapping in the meadow stubble along the edge of the pine wood. As the humans came closer the dusky birds fell still, all at once were poised, motionless. Broome put out his arm and stopped the governess and the child. Sure enough, there they go, hoarsely screaming and starting off in an outraged throng—they

seem to dread man's sudden silence even more than his proximity. Struggling to rise, their heads drawn into the desperate shoulders, the wings rough-whirring, they are hunchbacked beggars in sooty rags . . . but now gathering motion departing they take on grace darkly beautiful in the cold sun shining aslant upon the black glossy flying forms and the panic-sweeping wings outspread wide. But they were carrion birds, Erda had said, eaters of garbage and small carcasses and the young of others; he observed thereafter that when they descend they come flapping down with a limp double bounce and their feet hang ugly and a little curled so that they caused him to think of those of a foetal rat whose picture he once had seen in a biology book when he was a boy. Dark peculiar birds, but neither evil nor good; no choice, no morality, only to do what one must do. Feeding on carrion and the young of others . . . yet the swollen insanely fecund earth must be bled, the foul bones maggot-writhing cleanly picked of their putrescence. In England do they call them rooks? My father's untimely unremembered eyes beheld rooks in England.

The governess and the child looked at him oddly as he stood there with outstretched arm impeding their way, but he was satisfied. The cabin was in sight now, nestling within a grove of arborvitae; and the lake was shining through in big silver patches a stretch beyond. They continued on toward the cabin.

"Miss Blekely," the child said all of a sudden. Her lips were trembling. "Miss Blekely, I am *not* rude!" she cried, stamping her foot, and her thin little frame seemed charged with a kind of nervous desperation and outrage. "I am not, I am not!"

Miss Blekely's longish nose turned paler. "When you are in command of yourself," she said, "we will discuss it, later."

Why, you little witch, thought Broome; but really without judgment or censure; he was only startled. Once an urgency crystallized within the quivering half-puzzled world the child inhabited then perforce it was with almost creature-singleness that she was impelled, as a bee or a hummingbird by its instinct. It was almost terrifying, yet for Broome somehow precious to see, so fiercely was she herself, she had such an unreasoning integrity. But now he saw the governess trembling too.

Poor Blekely—he wondered again how old she was. Her chestnut hair was quite lovely, but she spoiled it, she had it caught up in an awkward, lumpish knot. Her coat was a faded green twill affair with a mousy collar. She walked without grace, carrying her brittle body as if

it were something she was wearing and it didn't fit. Only her rump was succulent: irony: that a plain woman should be most gifted in her least feeling womanly part. Poor Blekely, trembling girl, falsehaughty, you should have someone to smooth out the inward folds of your life. Your breasts should be thoroughly kissed, you should be warmed back into life at the secret places.

"Oh, look!" the child called to them as they came up near the cabin. She had darted off and now was bending by a boulder near an oak. "Look at the lovely snowdrop."

"Maria, it's getting close to dinner."

"Oh, come look. I beg you to look. It's quite alone, it's the only one."

"Come at once. The garden is full of snowdrops."

Miss Blekely unlocked the shaggy door (he could hear the far-off clamor of the crows, their hoarse acrid cries seeming to carry an almost brutish woe and agitation like the barking of seals. *In the park the hot sun steams with summer grass with rank urinous smell and effluvia of the captive beasts; exclaiming children, their eyes now pitying now bright with cruelty, flit breathless from cage to cage, ensorcered; and as we stand watching together, my body close upon your dark breathing haunch, then softly stirs the bloodawakened the silken slumbrous head of hunger.* Miss Blekely unlocked the door, and they went into the cabin.

Broome liked it. It had good light. Just bare enough; the piano, a chair, a long high table, a daybed. Logs and kindling were piled near the open fireplace. From the back window he could see the quicksilver glimmer of the lake through the cedars.

"Sometimes Mother practices in this cabin," said Maria. "But not in winter. Only when the weather gets warm."

"They used to cure meats here," said Miss Blekely, pointing to the three long iron rods that stretched from wall to wall below the apexed roof.

"Fine," he said. "I hope I get some honest work done here too." He noticed a small head sculpture on the mantelpiece.

"Once Emmy and I had a play here," the child quickly said.

"And who were you?" asked Broome, gazing at the obscure graven face.

"I was Rosalind. But I love Titania best."

"We have studied the *Tales*," Miss Blekely said. "Lamb's *Tales*."

"You may read my book," said the child. "But do you promise to return it?"

He went to the fireplace and took up the bust in his hands. A singular face lowering beneath a medieval coif—very long, almost lupine in its narrowness, the cheeks sunken away from the protruding bones, the long chin upturned to a point, like a witch's. The nose was hawkish, flaring out at the nostrils close upon lips that seemed cruelly thin and somber. The head was a cheap replica and in spots the ebon patina had begun to wear away so that the plaster showed through faintly: a bluish cut on the flat receding forehead, as though a stigma had been branded there; another across the right cheek beneath the staring eyeless socket. I won't have *you* watching me, thought Broome. It made him think of a poisoner or a pervert.

"Have you read Dante?" asked the governess.

"Is *this* Dante?"

He looked closely at the face again, the terrible mouth. Lusts had burned there. But this man had also known great imaginings—why did the face lack a sign of them? It must be for want of the eyes, you could not see the eyes, which so often light up a human countenance, otherwise ambiguous, with its most inward unconcealable necessity. "No, I haven't read Dante," he said, and put the head back on the mantelpiece.

The *Dante Symphony*. But Liszt is too expansive. Fleshy. It needs something dark, something corrosive, to get this man. *Francesca da Rimini*. More like it, Tchaikovsky had the poison in him. But too much wailing, self-pity; capable of anguish but not of regeneration. I wonder what the poetry is like. I must read more than I do. It's about the souls of the damned, I think. Yes, that man must have lain in the leprous pit, he walked the sighing guilt-thronged caverns of blackness—but he came up. There's the secret. To be fireplunged yet undestroyed. Beatrice, wasn't it? Beatrice and bodiless love. No hands ravished and ravishing with silkswoon suffusing touch, again, again, no lips nor softly laving search of tongue, the yearning limbs unclenched. Bodiless love—is it pretty talk or does such love exist in truth between men and women? (I beheld the droning bee, I beheld a golden fuzzy bee creep silent upon the lily whiteness of the breast; then half buried quiveringly it clung, beyond the portal the moist laid-open penetralia sightlessly stabbing.) Yet surely pretty talk never issued from that mouth so snakeslit and suffering. Perhaps you can truly know it only after you've had the other. *The crows are crying, the seals, and softly I against the dark breathing haunch. . . .*

Miss Blekely gave him the key. "Robert Macpherson knows Dante," she said. Then she and the child went back toward the house together.

He sat there awhile. It was very still in the dappled green-winy light of the approaching dusk; outside only a squirrel made a chattering rolling ventriloquial sound. Then soon he rose and ran his fingers up the length of the piano. It was fine, a fine tone. I'm going to work here, he thought, closing the lid on the dying G minor chord. . . .

As he went from the cabin into the darkening grove suddenly he heard, unsought, the shepherd call of the *Fantastique* . . . the quiet alternate breathing of the oboe and the English horn. Pure, pure, yet mysterious—almost like this very night falling here upon the mountains. Strange Berlioz, passionate folly-haggard Berlioz! with his fevered hunger for a half a thousand instruments and multitudinous voices all rising in an ecstasy and cataclysm of quired sound—yet who had ever known better the power of haunting with solitary instruments? Sometimes, in the early days of Broome's awakening, to be at a concert and to hear the Berlioz woodwind in the sudden orchestral hush had been almost unendurable, as though a rapture were on his young heart, but so piercing yet so perfectly subdued that it could only be experienced at the very marrow of aloneness; then he felt he must cry, whether for joy or for sorrow he did not know. Nor was this music romantic in any easy sense, such as can readily touch by reason of its rhapsodic languors a susceptible and dreamstruck boy. Instead, it had a dry white fire. Indeed it often seemed to Broome even now that beside its purity Wagner—save in the miracle of the *Meistersinger*—was false, almost libertine. Once he said this to Thirl. No, the old man answered, Wagner is very great. Yes, said Broome, he is the great sensualist. That too, said Thirl, but infinitely more; and wondered that Broome should have such scorn, even hatred, to find in another the very attribute which he himself so unmistakably possessed. Don't misunderstand me, the old man continued. For me Wagner is among the giants, but I don't say this to belittle the Frenchman. Berlioz has genius of an extraordinary kind. I suppose he'll always baffle the dull and the immature. He was still a moment, then quietly he went on, as if musing aloud: Berlioz, I think, not Wagner . . . Berlioz could have understood what the medieval poets meant, when they spoke of love.

Broome had other gods now, immeasurably greater, but always, to

behold those fragmentary and piercing gleams which the Berlioz music gave forth could move him in his innermost self. . . .

The oboe is calling, and now the dusky horn. Poor girl, he thought, walking in the early night, remembering how her face had looked as she danced in the kitchen that afternoon.

He had been sitting and talking with the little cook. "Delicious, Anna," he said, and took into his mouth another large piece of the fluffy goldbrown kuchen. She beamed at him as her small plump body jogged on the tiny feet from oven to sink. "*Ja,* eat, Mr. Broome!" she cried.

He enjoyed her. Her white starched kitchen dress was knee-short; she wore black cotton stockings and black high-laced shoes, so that she looked like a fat little schoolgirl, save that her hair was growing white and thinning out along the center part. He enjoyed her face, the elfin button nose and her ears protruding big as trumpets. Two peach spots ruddied her spheroid cheeks, and her round little eyes, peering out very brown and squirrel-bright, were deeply imbedded in heavy lids that gave an impression of triangularity.

"It's like my mother used to make it," he said.

"Ah, she was German too?"

"My mother was born near Vienna."

"*Ach,* Vienna. Such a beautiful city, Vienna."

"She left it when she was a girl. Went to England. And then she came here with my father."

"*Und* now? She is here?"

"No. She died a long time ago."

"Ah." She was standing by the open running faucet, with her back half turned to him. "She was young?"

"Too young, Anna."

The water flowed down unshattered, a sparkling column of silver; unmoving she held the rhubarb stalks. Then she turned her homely pink face to him, and tenderly smiling she said, "*Selig sind die Toten.*"

He heard the resignation, saw the faith in her innocent and simple eyes.

"I hear Vienna is pretty bad these days," he said harshly; "pretty well run down at the heels."

The tired face forever shut. The rotting skull now the lair of obscene worms.

"At the heels?" She looked at him puzzled.

"Poor," he said. "Hungry. The blood squeezed out of it."

"Ah." She understood. "*Ja.* Since the war." A suspicion of tears spread in her eyes. "Bavaria too. . . . *Mein bruder, Willi.* . . . He was not yet even seventeen."

Rain soaks through to the skull. In the sunlight, on the washed sweet earth, appear the worms. Purple they perish, bloated, ant-devoured. *Selig sind.*

He continued to sit there in the nostalgic warmth of the kitchen. She spoke little more, went about her duties almost as if he were not there. . . . But he had a quieter feeling. She gave him some cider and he smoked a cigarette.

Then after a while Miss Blekely came in with the littlest one. Emmy was five, a bluet of a child, gentle but not shy. Her arms were full of willow branches; the pussy globes were shining. The governess held yellow crocus and daffodils, very gay beneath her wintry face.

"Ah!" Anna exclaimed. "*Wie lieblich!*"

The governess looked severely at the smoking Broome, his whole body relaxed, his strong muscular legs stretched out and twined together.

"Anna," she asked, "where is Maria? Has she had her milk yet?"

"No, she was not present, Norma."

"Good afternoon," said the fair child, and made a grave little bow before him. He sat up startled, unwound his legs. "*Hul*-lo," he said, and wholly through impulse offered his hand. Getting the touch of the tiny cool fingers upon his own, suddenly he felt flowing in him a gladness, such as he had never before quite experienced, and in its intensity wholly disproportionate to the gracious little act of the child. He reddened, he felt like rushing from the room.

"Drink your milk well, Emmy," said the governess. She took up the willow boughs from the child's arms. Then she went out to arrange the flowers in the living room. Broome heard the horse come slowly clapping up into the graveled yard, the creaking clangor of the wheels. Instantly Maria shadowed in through the same door the governess had just used; Broome knew by her joyous dreading expression that she had delighted to elude Miss Blekely, to enter unbidden.

"Were you caught?" he whispered, grinning, sharing her child delight.

"No!" she gasped. She was shivering with excitement of the stratagem. Then, seeing his face, she realized that he had understood. She averted her eyes, as if she could not bear this intimacy. But now she too heard the hobnailed steps approaching along the yard. She flitted to the kitchen

door and opened it. "Come in," she called; and the two Huffman boys came in, bearing packages of eggs and butter.

"Your father's out walkin'," said the skinny, carrot-thatched one, putting the stuff down on the table. He looked at the golden cake.

"We passed him on the road," said his younger brother. He rubbed his puggy nose.

"Did you bring it, Gus?" Maria whispered. "*Bring* it in, Gus."

"Maria, look you forget your milk," said Anna loudly.

"Have you got it, Gus?" she whispered.

"Well, haven't got much time. Got deliveries down to Scholes."

"Just a little, Gus," pleaded Maria. "Please get it, quick."

"Do nothing of the sort," called Miss Blekely from the doorway. "Let it stay exactly where it is. Gus Huffman, I've told you again and again not to bring that thing near this house. We simply can't have you disturbing Robert Macpherson."

"But, Miss Blekely," cried the child. "Father is out walking. You know he is out walking. Do let Gus play a little."

"You have not even begun to drink your milk."

"What can you play?" asked Broome. Miss Blekely bit her lip, but was silent. The tall boy looked at her uncertainly, then at Broome. He went out. In a moment he came back with the battered accordion slung from his bony shoulder. He saw his younger brother devouring a gobbet of cake. "I just learned *Emalima,*" he said, gazing at the cake. He swallowed his frail, lad-downy Adam's apple, wet his scalloped lips, and began to play; first tentatively, then soon right out. The accordion gasped and blew. With slips and slides, blissfully off tune, a suspicion of melody arose; but his time was good, strictly he forced out a rhythm. *Sweet Ema-lima, my gal,* sang puggy-nose, his mouth crammed, the golden crumbs creeping upon his chin, arching forth upon the floor like grains of corn, *sweet Ema-lima, my gal.* Maria stood stiff as a cricket, chirruping in her throat with intensest glee. "That's you, Emmy!" she cried. "That's Emmy, Emmy, Emmylima!" The tiny flaxen sister began a dance, gravely, slowly, a little hop and a slow glide forward. Anna beamed, *ach, ach,* even Miss Blekely faintly smiled. The player gazed at the golden cake. . . .

Finally, with a last unpremeditated wheeze and squeak, the accordion died. . . . The spectacled tawny man was standing silent within the further door. Pool green were his eyes.

"Oh, Father, we're having such fun!"

"I was overruled," said Miss Blekely.

"Can you play a waltz, Gus?" said Macpherson, approaching.

*Beautiful Ohio* is unbeautifully moving on the spicy oven-warmed air. Suddenly he grasps the brittle Blekely by the waist and whirling they go waltzing, her feet astonished and uncertain but impelled by his will. "Oh, no!" she cries, she gasps, but her body stiffly whirls. The children are singing, Maria hops in frenzy. Huffman younger picks a startled nose and his left hand goes embezzling among the saffron cakes, but "ho-ho" roars the laughing Anna and watching in delight the dancers revolving she sharply smacks his dirty hand. Ohio is beautiful and now Broome has awakened and he leaps upon Anna, *nein, nein!* but he is hugging her plump waist, *Gott in Himmel* you will ruin my floor! and the round little applebreasts bounce beneath him as awkward they lurch like two dancing bears.

And Blekely now is lost. Her whirlpool head is upon his shoulder, her eyes are closed. Rapturously through her limbs floods the unfamiliar fire. . . .

He stood there breathing hard. But his eyes were wreathed with pleasure; with faint surprise, as if he was not quite certain how it had come about that these faces in the carnival kitchen should now be so oddly lighted. He looked from one face to another. They all glowed back to see his unaccustomed cheer—save Blekely, her meager bosom heaving, her flushed eyes averted.

"Erda will enjoy this," he said, and he walked toward the door.

The eyes followed him. The room was suddenly dark with expectancy.

"Erda!"

His voice went wandering through the house. They heard the echo.

Then the dark child went to him, and the dread was on her face. "Erda is away, Father," she said.

He looked at the child in an instant of doubt and groping. Then he patted her head. "So she is," he said, "so she is. She has gone for Walt." He smiled gently. "Don't fret, darling," he said. "She'll be back in a few days." He turned to the skinny awed Huffman lad and, giving with his hand a little gesture of commendation and farewell, said, "Thanks, Gus. That was a damned fine waltz."

With a slow step, nodding gently, smiling, he went through the door.

The dusk was cold. Against the sky's yellow light how dark the hemlocks were, how mysterious. (Darkly, darkly, dies the Berlioz wood-

wind.) Broome walking toward the house heard the eerie penetrating note of the spring frogs, a piping very pure, very reedy, rising from the icy pools of the marsh. The air vibrated as with an oboe wildness.

## II. IT WAS THE WINTER DREAD

*(Robert Macpherson thinking)*

For finally nothing is hidden from me, and if I refuse to play Beethoven God will understand, He at least will not sneer. At night the wind screams in the White House and he lies devoured his lips no longer saying I have no anxiety about the triumph of my principles, I have seen fools resist Providence before and I have seen their destruction, and now broken the darkness drowns him and where passion like light once flooded the casket of Wilson's brain the silentsounding mouths of vermin move dreamless and without pity there. So I say if hate goes crawling through the eye of our life why should we play Beethoven, we are sick of sublimities. Sometimes he heard the wild and unmistakable sounds —but sometimes nothing more than a simple fistful of notes no more beautiful than the beat of horsehooves or that child's cry on the swarming summer air, for let them not talk too much to you of afflatus, you need no soulful, only let the mind be as stubbornbent as the hand to the cobbler's task—heard the wild and unmistakable sounds as he bent to fasten his shoe, or after he had walked for hours at night and was perspiring, sat down at the piano, just so, wet and his body tired but not knowing he was tired with the madness on him—and then who was saner? Later they will say it is my mind, but I know better for God is with me and I will say it is not my mind, it is your heart which has no understanding. Thirl is a great surgeon, and once when I was much younger and not as happy as I am now we stood leaning over the white fence. It was June and night and very late and very still and flowers were speaking everywhere, they wounded me. I see now why I am ill, no wonder, there is no end of flowers blooming in my brain. Roses are heap'd on the beloved's bed. No, rose leaves, when the rose is dead, are heap'd on . . . Shelley unearthly drowned. Like Mozart, the air burning bright, the elements swift of fire of water and always the radiant and darkburning air. But leaning over the white fence it

was the fragility of loveliness he spoke of, and therefore Thirl and I understand each other, I long ago forgave him for letting my father die under his hands, for though he was my father he was his friend and so Thirl suffered more than I. I know that he has loved many women and I hope I can grow old as he has too proud for libertinage —but why should he pretend that man was only passing through and stopped for a friendly visit? I see through him. I will expose him in the end or he may do mischief to those I love, but I will not judge him for who am I? The Lord instructs me, I am not fooled, I read the heavy book when no one saw I read the ridiculous lying book and I know very well whom they mean when they say the disorder is gradual in its onset and assumes the form of an insidious change of personality the significance of which is seldom understood by the patient's friends until the malady has reached an advanced stage. I am certain of this because sitting at night wet with perspiration at the piano by the draughty open window the doctor came sneaking up and he shouted, it is your mind! Well, Beethoven was not articulate, we have no words for his thought for words are evil and are only used to make pieties of the crimes men commit. He could not write about music as I have done in journals, though Busoni did, magnificently wrong *Aesthetik der Tonkunst* and Schumann, of course. Ah, there was a witty sufferer but of course it's true the aural membranes are extremely sensitive and plunging the head in icy water may . . . but take the cavatina, those broken notes of the first violin, if tears are wanted where shall we find them more terrible and lenitive? And sneaking up at the window how could he understand when that squat and pockmarked fellow quietly said I renounce the world which has no presentiment that music is a higher revelation than all their wisdom and philosophy. Silly, guileful, nosepoking, those are *sounds,* don't you hear them in their slowness so divine they have no power of themselves to cease, for their true dimension is the length of heaven and they fall no less finely on the listening ear than moist and invisible particles fall on the purest summer morning. Those are sounds born of human weakness and ill . . . do you not see it is something to belong to the same race of beings as he? Poking your nose, vile, I shall continue to hide my papers when you enter, I vomit at the sight of you. I am a lord of life, which is vaporous and very cunning and often seems beautiful and out of our noblest follies shapes us imperceptibly to idiot ends. Believe me, I am humble, it is only your malice I detest. If we sing *Schaffe in mir Gott ein rein Herz*

then have the grace, fool, to realize that Bach understands human suffering else how could he have . . . why, it is ridiculous to speak of him as classic when the fugue is really if understood aright the most romantic of forms and only the northern which are the romantic races can use it effectively. Why, as a matter of fact that was the year I found rooms on Centralstrasse. He had been lost at sea and she gave me board and all for only eighty marks a month. Kati had strong smooth legs and I was nervous but later it was joy and it was the first time and later drinking wine at the Prusse I laughed when he said go easy your gift will run thin, but whenever I went into the Thomaskirche I swore that my life would be fruitful hearing the organ in the dim and heartmoving. . . .

So listen, I will not be put off. Many have lived on music, but I have mostly lived for it, and I say that we must no longer play Beethoven. He was syphilitic, I grant you this, but it has been proved that his sufferings were not due to a primary cerebro-spinal lesion but to an acquired taint which invaded one organ after another. Think of his magnificence, his purity, and cry for wonder, and admit now the war is over that we have nailed him to the . . . the gift of the wine of the wafer of the blood runs thin *O Christ lag in Totesbanden!* Harding is inaugurated but *he* sits paralyzed in S Street and at night the wind screams over his fouled grave. So why should we play the music? I tell you we are sick of sublimities. I tell you we are sick we are sick I tell you sublime we are sick.

Are these my own people who are so gross and sneering and jealous of my purposes? Is it then so unseemly an act for a man to rise from his own table and say I must go now, I must work while the daylight lasts, there are things of great peril and significance yet to be done? But I admit I should not have frightened poor Anna, she had no way of knowing how important that orange was for my safety. Aye, before her sight there is no indignity too low or grievous to be worked upon me. In Bavaria they remember him well and the streets are black with people jeering this is the one who sang the "Heroic Ode for Voice and Orchestra" while our son coughed up his redundant peasant heart and now my stature is noble yes magnificent as the shit and droppings of hyenas. As for the others I disavow them. It is enough to strike one dumb forever only to think that you can spend a lifetime among those you love and then suddenly realize when your back is turned how not

one no not a single one is greater in understanding or more compassionate than . . . the head of the Institute. I gave them my life and they said I was a poor executive and now I am cold and my shivering feet burn. And yet why is it not possible to write a Requiem which will be of no religion no race no platoon only Milton's and sing in endless morn of light with those terrible plucked notes leaving us nothing but man falling from cliff to cliff from cloud to cloud with the fuselage broken and bloody into the . . . Oh I am not done I have immensities still I am not finished not shattered . . . yes, listen, listen, do you hear the choir of soft and majestic trombones? Anna, some moments are imperishable. How clearly I remember Nikisch with his own orchestra in Leipzig playing the sublime plucked terror of surely the most wonderful introduction in all music to that last movement. So why not a Requiem of no tribe no platoon the plucked guts screaming all night on the civilized wire no race no religion singing in German and French and Syriac and Singhalese I am the bright and the morning star. Behold I come quickly, surely I come quickly. Amen, even so come Lord. His name shall be on their foreheads .22 caliber and I saw a pure river of the water of life for the healing of Nations. So why not a Requiem since we are in constant communication over the singing gutstrewn wire and like a subterranean river of blood a noble and grave theme heard but unseen but smelled stinking and roaring in the depths of my noblest aspirations, why not a Requiem since for many months I have felt it rising with paeans and groans to the surface of godhead my parturient belly of Western culture. These days some of them pretend to sneer Brahms this Brahms that but send them back say to the C Minor let them listen to Nikisch conducting that half-close of music in the second phrase with the minor third of the key unbearably dying in the heart, for music is an art of cadence Anna and the fall of it must fall upon the heart as on the air, and go to them and say be bold but I warn you be humble for perchance the cloak is on you, and tell them Brahms is great yes a whole full man he loved in tender silence and anguish (but what was he doing exalting the Prussian arms?) and sometimes rowdy seemed brutal but in truth only his understanding was tough. Hear how his voice rings with the sound of his slaughtered folk, the innkeepers and Hamburg fishermen and the whores leaning from the windows of the Ehebrechergang, aye hear his voice rising on the stormy and fogdim Northern air and let us be shown in what ways beyond treaties and elections men may be equal. Go Anna, go with

Nikisch and confound the juiceless the fabricators the whores of music, go with the Brahms and let but a breath and sigh of his passion blow a whole coterie of them into oblivion.

But forgive me Broome you at least understand what I have tried to do and you know I am conservative only in honoring the heritage, in using not embalming like the patriots with full and obscene military honors over the uncaring skulls of the . . . For after all we cannot compose in free forms until we have mastered those binding and current in all rat-torn ages, and if any man have it in him to speak parables then surely his tongue must not be unknown save to rats. It is such as you—for I have recognized you Broome—you who can understand the poet's I love you freely, as men strive for right, I love thee purely, as they turn from praise, and therefore you must fight as I have the eccentrics the tricksters of this noble armistice period with their ballets scored for Liberty motors and four mechanical and deathdealing pianos, for my career is over Broome it is no longer interesting save to my enemies. And yet do I not have the right to say that I have always been on the side of the makers not the remakers of music? So why are you not here Broome since I ask for you constantly? I regret every vain and selfless expenditure of my immoral my immortal youth and I counsel you oh I counsel you genius must know how to guard itself against generous and futile labor. Goethe knew this, in hushed moments monstrous with slander he drew me aside and whispered, be careful, human beings cannot endure superiority save at a distance and only the very great are nourished by hatred and abuse. So I counsel you Broome be tireless in the study of evil. . . . But oh forgive me cleanse my heart God, have I not found among artists as much love and generosity as among any men living? There is nothing to compare with this delight in the fine work of others, to forget oneself in a pure and calm contemplation of . . . for after all among the genuine artists not the tradesmen but no sneering no sneering for after all there are many tasks for many hands of many degrees and kinds and without the hundreds of Zarlino and Gabrieli and Buxtehude and Schütz how could we imagine Bach, for the assembling of materials into a style is communal and many are yeoman and obscure, and yes among artists there can be nothing really competitive and I dreamt constantly of a haven for young. . . . But they said of me Macpherson suffers little composers to come unto him, well why not yes come unto me. I have had a hard and bitter experience of how to make a career and I can teach you brilliantly how it may be

shattered. Come be sensible Broome and be less proud and single, I can see you have too little worldly ambition and are more zealous for growth than advancement. Ah but forgive me forgive me I am not a mocker and least of all can I mock the image of my own dearest verity. I only imagine I am filled with hatred, but I understand, I am wise now. In the subway I looked into the faces of men and I understood them every grief and greed all nobility and abomination of thought that has ever been borne aye that has ever been borne and I could sense the sparrows flying far faster than the train faster than evil flying like filthy bats and hawks through the roaring and silent blackness of the tunnel . . . but the sparrow fell. Oh don't you see don't you understand—the sparrow fell! Oh truly I cannot bear it, have pity, I long for the sun again, for spring—do you not agree, Erda, the sun is a good physician? Yet the prying sneak the eavesdropper, candor forces me to admit he is right to that extent, I have never been wise enough to avoid those problems which were beyond my powers. But how dare *he* say it? he said I admire your music very much and I knew he was sneering and when he also said I admire Wagner then I saw the full degree of his treachery. Lascivious Wagner, in music you must write *with* love, not about it. You dress up your brasses like loudmouthed whores and your orgasmic strings sigh and swoon they sigh and soon they swine and snout in the perfumed and adulterous boudoir. There are no "love scenes" in Beethoven, no fornications in Gluck, there is only *love*. Yes today the young men may be uncertain but they have found you out, Wagner, they go to purer sources. And I to God, to God go I for *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*. Ah it is an evil time, I cannot bring myself to disagree with you, Beethoven, even though I have given so much to the ingratitude of my country's . . . I have no answer and can only wait on my Lord's compassion and charity when you say that perhaps the dissonances throughout the whole opera should not be quite resolved for our civilized music cannot be conceived in such weird and desolate times. I understand what you mean for riding in the subway sitting opposite them I looked into the faces of men and I understood God. He stood in the balcony night after night and his hands and his shoes and the rimed lashes of his old sunken feverish eyes were white and he said as he coughed I am twenty-two and we often had pogroms and now I am a housepainter in democratic America and my people are dead. After work at six I sneak in here without paying for I barely live and I hide in the toilet until the music begins but they often catch

me and throw me out but who loves Moussorgsky as I do? He was dissolute but even after the white fever took a comradely grip on him which we call delerium tremens he began to read Darwin and wrote *Khovantschina* and one day seeing the imbecile boy chased by cruel flowerlike children through the diseased and religious village he felt a sudden rapture a sorrow and knew that henceforth his strength must be drawn from the Russian masses and people, and reading Darwin he had no illusions about the kind of animal he was dealing with and one day he wrote when a strong and amorous woman clasps her lover to herself he knows he is suffering violence yet he has no wish to free himself from her embrace since it is the very violence that makes him taste the cup of . . . then we had tea he drinking it with the spoon stuck in the glass alongside the cave of his young and ghastly cheek and talked recalling his life so hunted and insect-brief and all the centuries of his people sitting in lampsmoky hovels reading the books of the Chassidim and remembering in whispers those impious and wild-brained kin now in Siberian snow who could not be slaves. But I never saw him again, for death sat in his eye and lunched on his leadeaten lungs and an aristocrat he wrote *Boris* and those passionate somber songs out of the Russian soul dying in that infested underworld which bestowed upon him evergreen lice and laurels. Don't you see Broome there is an endless conflict in the artist between that in him which must be fulfilled through withdrawal and the desire to serve and act among men? In my own lifetime I have seen myself discarded. It is my winter and my night, I will never feel the sun's warm hand again. I practice a lot but I have no feeling in my finger tips, they are no longer mine the wisdom has gone out of them. Why is everything so changed and unnatural? But I do not blame you Broome it is myself has changed not you. We speak of fate, but these visitations are on us of our own will —in truth I myself contrived what only seems to be happening to me. So I do not blame you, you are a hardy a perennial and you will see the sun again. As for me, in my youth I traveled much, but now I know it is the highest happiness, a rich and consolatory thing, to have birth and life and death in the same house. And these we have had, and shall have them, birth, and life, and death.

Seeking her out he listened as he went so he could avoid the eyes of the others. He came upon her in the corridor leading to the kitchen. Anna, he said eagerly and with intense contrition, Anna, be easy again,

I beg you to be easy. Oh, *ja,* she trembled, pleaded, I am easy, I am easy, Mr. Macpherson. I am a good man, he said, I only want justice in our life here. If I scolded it was not because I abhor you, Anna. Oh, *ja,* Mr. Macpherson, and tears came up from her heart so simple and frightened and blindly filled her triangular eyes, you are such a good man. I forbid you to say it, I am not good, he said, hearing the hideous and derisive voices cackle and accuse as the coffee cups rattled on the tray she held trembling in her smallish pink hands. I spent many fine years of my life in your country. I met Busoni there, Mahler was my friend. And yet I scolded you. The early winter night was falling and the corridor was dim, for she had not yet turned on the single lamp and he did not see that she too was weeping. Believe me, Wilson did his best but they had cynical and bloodshot eyes. He did his very best for your brother, I assure you of this. He clasped and wrung his hands and she heard the bones of his hands crack. I have lost many brothers! he cried, and hearing his voice she felt she must faint, she must die, of pity, of fright. But he grew quieter as he stood there listening, and finally very tender he said, so never forget, Annchen, if I scold you it is only because I have grown very wise.

Very wise, he whispered as he went carefully on his toes and let his eyelids droop lest a light run suddenly along the wall and confront him again with the untoothed phosphorescent faces of murdered boys. She is virtuous and not defiled, he thought, she is cleft with no man's lecherseed and she is the only one who can remember and be trusted to bring the orange for my dessert. Ah they would not trap him easily. He had faithful friends and they had warned him. He would peel it with his own hands. Wise, he thought, very wise, for He is with me, and smiling with terror he tiptoed into the living room and let his eyelids droop again lest he find her silently dancing there with her frightful Orphic grace and reptilian hair, lest her poxed and slimlascivious breasts mock him once more to impotence and he be caused to see thrown back from the eyeless glitter of her singing face the images of his own catastrophe.

Father, she said.

There, he thought, growing pale, hearing the sudden song, and what shall I do, he thought, standing still, shall I open them? Pater says, or was it I myself? or was it He? says the word is derived from the Greek signifying to shut, to shut one's lips brooding on what cannot be uttered, and yet the word mystic as he frankly confesses can be

interpreted as shutting the eyes that one may see the more inwardly. *Father.* Then let me be undaunted, my Lord is with me: open them. Let the sight be but inwardly enlightened and it will find everywhere —yes, everywhere, I say, of whatever kind or hierarchy of things of every grandeur and nothingness—will find the soul's counterpart in this loathsome and unspeakably beautiful common world I a moment ago created. Yes, you shall be vigilant of shapes and sounds and have reported by them the heaven you seek in vain and have endlessly within you. Opening his eyes wide and looking neither to the right nor to the left he crossed the room with fixed blind gaze and went to the window. He looked out between the curving draperies expecting to behold a leopard blackness of night but instead he saw snow falling. Father, she said, and he did not answer nor did he turn but only stood intently watching the drooping and upcurved lowerlimbs of the great Norwegian spruce upon which from somewhere in the house a light flowed dimly. There is no escape! he cried, seeing the shaggy yellow and blackmottled antlers of the beast approaching, but father she said and took his hand and he looked down at her in astonishment and clearly remembered how once in the spring they had stood talking together by the spruce and he had said you must always try to improve yourself. How shall I improve myself father? and he touched her quick and creature face and said you must walk constantly in the forest. Yes, he thought in astonishment and pleasure, and looked out and saw the very spruce and saw snow falling over it in soft big flakes and it was beautiful slowfalling snow and there was no beast now only a palegold light flowing out from this house which was his home upon the noble and submissive tree and white snow falling dim and white and for an instant like delicate golden feathers across the streaming light, and turning he recognized her as she sat there with her book and he thought, this is my child, my daughter, this is the pure and precarious fruit of the tree of my life.

Why, who is this?

Don't you remember? It is me, it is Maria.

Why, so it is, he said, and smiling he touched her as of old, and a realization came to him that they had returned to this room from immense and lonely polar distances. And so it is, he thought, and heard his unmoving mouth say and what land do you come from? and heard in his gigantic wisdom the answer fall like crystals of Siberian snow from her deathpale lips as reading and dancing there she did not reply

a land both strange and sweetly familiar, a land close as the tumult of your heart yet dimmer by far than the dream you will dream tonight. And do you bring a message? he silently cried as he sat down on the sofa she curling up beneath his cherishing hand and when she spoke but did not say like a daughter of God yes a message one of hope and one of charity then in bliss and in peace his brain ecstatically sang my child my daughter then come unto me. Suddenly he felt darkness unroll and fold down from his brain like a shutter and seeing her sitting there by his side he said,

Let me look at you. I have been so busy.

Yes, I know, Father. They told me.

Why, how pale you are.

Am I pale, Father?

Why yes, you are very pale. Have you been away?

No, I have not been away. It is only my color. It is the color of my skin.

Ah yes, darling. You were born dark and pale, I remember. You are my dark one, you are my bobolink. But how you tremble. Why do you tremble?

I am happy, Father.

Ah, yes, you will always be happy. You will see, I have arranged it. No harm will befall you.

It is snowing, Father. Tomorrow may we go out on the sleigh?

Do you think it will be deep enough?

Maybe it will snow all night, Father.

Yes, it will be deep enough, it will be very deep. Splendid, splendid. A damned fine idea. I will arrange it. I will be the pilot and you my cargo. You shall be more precious than treasures and silks. You are my bobolink and we will go like the wind.

Oh Father, what fun!

How good my life is, he thought, and tears came into his eyes. He bent and kissed the thin child's face. She held him desperately, lest he suddenly and mysteriously depart, and holding each other they wept, and felt they were happier than they had ever been in their lives before.

And soon she said, shall I read to you, Father?

Yes, read to me, he said, and languor was unaccustomed slow and delicious on his eyes.

". . . the cradle was put into a small drawer of a cabinet, and the drawer placed upon a hanging shelf for fear of the rats. . . . The young

girl was so handy that after I had once or twice pulled off my clothes before her she was able to dress and undress me. . . ." and he recognized with a little happiness the note of wonder creeping into her voice and not hearing the words only the music he felt sorrow and pride fall on him and he was proud thinking yes she is of the race of storytellers. We remember the roughcarven vessels over the fires and the elders with grave bearded speech in the flittery circle of fire and dark in the night invisible with spume-icy rushing of water in the Scottish night. The blue flowers toss, and sleep gently rings its childhood bell, but tomorrow is Sunday we wake and come Walt into the forest bring your wild and curious heart and with our atlas and dewy eyes we shall rediscover how our fathers lived in this quiet fold of the hill by the gray-green restless the abiding and motherly sea. But it is a new land, he thought. opening his eyes hearing the savage wind over the mountains the deserts spreading immense through all the house and oh my son what have you done with the atlas of this more bitter land? Is it not an odd thing that one who has lived in the imagination's farthest places should have this hunger for the known images of . . . Moleto (Gioseppe) Discorso Universale with 18 maps 5 of which relate to America vellum Venetia appresso V. Valgresi 1561. . . . "she was very good-natured and not above forty feet high, being little for her age. . . . But the next morning Glumdalclitch my little nurse told me the whole matter. . . . The poor girl laid me on her bosom and fell weeping with shame and grief—" and yet, he thought, suppose it is a hostile land, why should I not sleep? We came up from Siena through the wild country and in Volterra the marble workers spent half the night singing and they said he is unwise who sleeps at night for if we work by day when shall we sing? When are we to sing, he thought, hearing the incessant A, if the ear is the organ which is busiest in night and darkness? When are we to sleep if it is the last to slumber and the swiftest waking with the terrors of morning? Through the ear we can influence men by a whisper even in their deepest-sunken dreams, for they have told us it is most closely kin to the sense of touch and to the organs of foresight, offense and revenge. After all Swift spewed up a cold and fiery rage, metal to pierce and ring out bitterbronze on the night of concupiscence and . . . therefore only consider the attributes of night and darkness and you must see that if the eye could not of itself create light and the brain of itself thought then they could receive no light or thought. And so, he said not rising feeling his enormous head tor-

turously held and bowed down by the thousand Lilliput thongs, I must work while the daylight lasts.

But Father, I haven't finished. May I finish? Please let me, it's very interesting.

I must go now.

But you will not go away, will you, Father?

Away? I go away? Why, this is my home. I am captive here.

They said you might have to go away.

Was it that fool, was it that sneak of a fool?

I heard them talking.

Oh the treachery, the vileness of men. You see, there is no one I can trust. I can't go back there, I tell you I can't go back. I gave them my life and they said I was not a skillful executive. I wanted a flowering of music in our country. I believe in this land, don't you see? Why should we have warmed-over moods of the nineteenth century? This is not dwarf and bloodshot Europe, this is our immense our hopeful anguished country, it is America why our very youth our springtime. But even we are corrupt. They ride at night with fire and crosses and that man that evil lustful idiot sneaking up at the window screaming it is your mind, why does Wilson keep him why does he allow him to be head of the Palmer Department? Why even in your country Erda we love you you are bountiful yet in Indiana too your people are foul and dwarfed with hate. I can't go back, I shall die if I go back. This is my home, have pity, bobolink. My objects are not yet fulfilled. After all, we speak of revolutions but isn't Palestrina great? Does Swift read our hyena hearts less intently? Perhaps there is no progress, perhaps we do not evolve but are only altered. I say that even the most dynamic changes only release forces already stirring. So I have faith in our land, I have a responsibility. *Kennst du das Land?*

Are you tired, Father? Don't you want to rest?

I must go now, he said, and groaning sharply flung his head up crimson and galled with constraint. Could they have meant me in the lying sneaking book when they said the problems of life are too great to be borne and there is a desire for nullity? Can they mean me deterred by the instinct of self-preservation and the actions a kind of dramatization of death in which it is imagined but not actually achieved? Then I shall confound them. I shall be immortal if only I am constantly occupied. But oh always to have it said, the critics mapping out strategy when the advance has already begun, issuing marching orders when

already the citadel is taken, oh always to have it said it is clearer that this is a work of genius than that it is in any final sense a great work. But we are not done. God watches and we have reserves of grandeur. *In Dir ist Freude.* But the Cantatas why does he why do we have the Protestant death obsession the fear and yet the hunger for it? Death walks among them too but perhaps the warm Southern sun and even in Verdi's *Requiem* in the *Stabat Mater* of Rossini an irradiation and they are not frozen with guilt and terror as we morbid Protestants but instead their lives *glow* with death and because of it are more passionate. He was peasant born and through zeal for God and frugal sacrifices he got together a church of about a hundred slum wretches and I had to go out miles to the edge of Paris almost out to Vincennes to Pastor Rigot. I played either abominably or else they are not fond of music, and while I played the fat woman took up the collection and I had to carry my chair to and from the piano and I thought had they only enjoyed the music these workingmen and baffled women I would have been willing to carry the piano to and from the chair and later the moon shone and I had chocolate at that little Café Noël off the Boulevard des Italiens. . . . But look, she has finished reading and her glance is an old woman's obsessed with Protestant. . . . I must go, he said.

But where must you go, Father?

There is not much time. I must work while the daylight lasts.

But the day is over, Father. It is nighttime.

It is nighttime it is dark it is dark it is the nighttime dark of our darkest oh my poor fatherless child and children I can only assure you that life can be lived fragrantly but I can do nothing myself to achieve it. How they bloom how in my wise and gigantic brain . . . *der Himmel lacht, die Erde jubilieret.* And what did she say? he asked, halting, looking into her face with dreadful hope. Did she too say I must go away? Did Erda say it too?

No, Father. She told them she would not let you go away. She said you could only be happy here.

Oh faithful one. Oh fragrant as rainwashed grasses. My helper, my love. Bobolink, was she afraid?

She cried, Father.

Tell her not to be afraid. I shall not leave her. Poor faithful child, my Erda, that was long ago, I have given up recitals. Tell her if I travel again I promise she will go with me. Do you trust me?

Oh yes, Father. I trust you, I always trust you.

There are some who will try to poison your mind against me. But you must trust me.

I trust you, Father.

Tonight if I should not see Erda you must greet her for me.

I promise, Father. But won't you eat with us tonight?

Yes. But sometimes I cannot greet her. When you are older you will understand many things. Now trust my wisdom, and remember I love you all even more than death. Why do you sneer?

I am not, Father. I am not sneering.

Where is Walt?

In school, Father.

Where is Erda?

She is upstairs, Father.

Ah see, my life is fragrant, I will sin no more. God is good I have been granted prophylactics against oblivion, for out of you a son and I named him for the bellthroated oceansinging Walt and how my heart was moved with recognition and exalted coming upon those words of the leonine saying *I am the man—I suffered, I was there* and I named my son out of her womb with bloodmoist deepasleep *Tod das ist die kühle Nacht* and I named him Walt. We stood at the font at the entrance and the stained glass and the sun came in from the cold blue and white morning. He babbled and Erda was beautiful in white and he looked gravely from one to another gave one kick when he took him in his arms and said, we receive this child into the congregation of Christ's flock and do sign him with the sign of the Cross in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified. I named him Walt before God but he shall not again hear of churches from my lips. They said the words manfully to fight under His banner and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end, but did they hear that Bavarian boy when he cried? did they weep in the streets black with people jeering this is the one who sang the "Heroic Ode for Voice and Orchestra"? You know, there are many who believe a child's name can exercise an influence on its future and I named him for Walt a nurse among the nailed and broken in the Union hospitals. It is like yesterday but what connection is there between this grief and the rapture of our youth? I can see him scratching his white beard making the boat ready and the arbor was woodbine alongside the canal and waiting we sat together with our hock and our butterbrot. Do you remember the mossy old mills like great tired birds? Do you

remember the old women knitting on the doorsteps, some weeding flax as we glided past, and that small girl in a red petticoat and white starched cap threw poppies and lilies to us in the stern yes forget-me-nots and Kaiserblumen but what did he know sneaking up to the window shouting it is your mind his arrogant and silly sticking-up mustache of the life and the reasons and the amiable hungers of those fine people the village band playing in the distance as we slowly glided on and the first stars winked and snapped at those fine jolly fellows swinging the slim and peachplump girls in the waltzing grove with kneebreeches . . . but you poor Blekely poor Norma Blekely withered and unswung. And oh the abominable band but we were pleased joking about the wheezy-grackle woodwinds and waving and calling to us in the boat some a little impudent like comrades others shyly as though sensing and sharing the secret as I touched you and felt faint and powerful and I saw my desire in the dark water softly running and shining with stars in the Spreewald. But on the Berlin streets those whitecoated dogs of Caesar strutted with long swords clanking their spurs and counting five before they bowed and sometimes you imagined suddenly turning a corner and seeing the old fiercelean ferret face that it was Moltke's ruthless ghost but he must have been dead a long time and sometimes you saw the other's withered arm in the royal box the night Busoni—and later the kneebreeches lay folded undancing in attics and their intestines spattered other groves without woodwinds or flowers. We stood leaning over the white fence it was very still and late and flowers spoke . . . of Shakespeare and the fragility of . . . shall I compare thee to a summer day? thou art more lovely and more temperate. Yet what a poison and loathsomeness of disillusionment spread in the tissues of that noblest brain those last years perhaps Swift too when to f—— a woman was abomination and boys were sweeter. She is numb and suffering and I buried my face in the pillow groaning I prayed for the waters of oblivion but it's nothing darling please it doesn't matter darling and I begged God to cover me with darkness it's nothing Rob just rest rest I love you and turning my face to the wall crying do not touch me as her hand pleaded with my face my cold and passionless and vilest brow it's nothing it will come again what bliss we have known you are only tired it's nothing rest darling oh rest and ash was cold and dry and black in my mouth and into my belly rushed pouring and I begged God to cover me with darkness with oblivion with nothingness of death.

Father, please. Oh I beg you. Father. Father, I beg you. *Father!*

# TWO POEMS

by

Oliver Hale

## *THE SEARCH*

My one wish always is to catch,
from the hand organ's playing, a thread
to help me back to my childhood.
Whenever I am about to touch
one that seems there, it is not quite
in reach. I hear the melodies
and they are no different from those
played then, yet they never seem right.

Something has gone out of the music
of hand organs. I shall go on
listening, and search for the one
that may indicate the way back;
to the world caught in the album—
myself at eight with ball in hand,
my starched sister with doll for friend,
contained there, locked in an old time.

## *ANTHOLOGY*

*Sparrow*

He fits like sunlight the familiar days
and is real as air; he is the bright word

of good morning, the reassurance toward
continuance: o necessary bird,
as true and present as a commonplace!

*Blue Jay*

Actor and mischief-maker, the blue jay
is all small boys, crueler still; precise
as metal, he shines. One we saw today
chafed at our nearness, his adolescent voice
harsh as his cannibal beak, and furious.

*City Pigeon*

The dowager bird whose walk is middle age
presses against my nature like famine,
erodes me like good deeds; I cannot gauge
its adequacies: here unspent hungers run,
and little riots round my patience rage.

*Gull*

The flights of birds vary, this scavenger
is always beautiful, even his shape
burns; one would think eaters of decay are
dank and dull: see him in phosphorescent sweep
circle the harbor, following a ship!

*Swans*

The swans glide across water as if ice
forms beneath them, their whiteness is remote
as glaciers; they are hostile as we pass,
the papier-mâché beaks, painted orange, hiss,
and the snowstorm feathers ruffle with hate.

*Eagle*

Our eyes met as if lights were in collision,
loneliness widened into mine; in his cage
inanimation marbled him like age:
here still was power but a fallen nation,
unpurposed, a vacant spirit, no rage.

# POEM

by

Alan Dugan

In spring when the ego arose from the genitals
after a winter's refrigeration, the sergeants
were angry. It was a time of looking
to the right and left instead of straight ahead.

Now the rich lost tastes have been lost again,
the green girls grown brown for another year.
The intelligent body makes ready for the atrophy begun
by north winds and declination of the sun.

Say death say loneliness say fear. These words
are luxuries no more but the true words of winter
when the flesh hardens and collects itself around
the skeleton to protect what little it contains.

If anything is to happen let it happen now.
If anything is expected of us let the orders be cut
immediately and read winter; the proper season
for caution. Match, if you can, its coldness.

# HOMEGOING, DOWN MOUNTAIN

by

Will Gibson

November at hand in twigsnap of air, at heel in the kindle
of leaves, at nostril and earhole and lip
cries, is upon me, mouths at me, cries itself into my marrow,
like aspens it comes at in whorl and whip

and crawls on, woos to undo and put off, pries in at limbs
and inmates: what in me cries in answer
is aspen, but I have another and witherless taproot. Hill
once leafhung is crooks of sticks in a stance

of hagscath and clacks in the winds, the golden time is down
and disordered, and under the slough of terrain,
brown grass, gray rocks, rust forest beds, no heartbeat is now
at kick: the lymph of the world is draining

below and away. If I wade in the frostbits of leaves, or turn
and am staggered by whorl knock, what is afoot
to affright a man? but here is a month to shrivel the eggbag
and dryrot the knees. Logfall and windloot

whistling me home to the tipsy gables of towns on the lowlands
bring me to lights and doorsills, entry
to twine in another and winterless bed of folk, but tree
and tree behind me rise like a country

of gibbets. Time when I envied your wood is past. Hang now
in a winter solstice out of harry and ken,
while I in my tangles of gut come home to the wifebelly town,
and my hand makes love in its hair again.

# THE ARRIVAL

by

Eleanor Wells

We sailed past the outer islands,
above the hidden ledges of coral, among
the atolls of yellow sand and the green
forgotten ships wrecked in a green sea.

Below us the fathomless shadow lay,
and the polyps building in death
waited for the wind to drive us
sharp on his spear and down.

Through iridescence moving, through
the various seas and the low skies of morning,
through shifting breeze and odor of
island and flower, through

the theatrical moment of sunrise
when the mountains were stripped of mist
and their striations clearly showed beneath
the curtaining green of foliage,

through time itself we came to our arrival;
there anchorage for the heart was found,
and swinging wide upon the dazzled water
we rested in imagination's harbor.

See with a child's eyes the island
illimitable upon the stationary sea;

enlarge the hills to a gigantic size
and the lilies to the magnitude of tigers.

Imagine, as the child, this city
where as yet no step has been taken,
where the streets run into the
diminishing perspective of the future;

where a house may be constructed
in the instant of our appraisal,
and an auralia hedge may grow
like a conjurer's trick before our eyes.

O the streets of the city are
populous with tomorrows; here
the years are already destroying
outmoded buildings and aqueducts,

while in the botanical garden
the century palm is thinking
of the new and marvelous
blossom of a hundred years hence.

Imagine how in that garden
the shadow of the tree that will
lengthen later in our lifetimes
is still curled sleeping at the root.

# FIVE POEMS

by

George W. John

*1*

Presently I shall be with the song
I sent into the morning
into the night along to the dead
I shall be led
. . .
presently I will belong
to the still song.

*2*

I take charge of events
but the tide of the evening
is still at large
and that is because it has
no high or low
and nothing the mind can provide
will prevent this slow night-inglide
and going!

*3*

I must keep the world together
while it is falling away

so I say "hello" to my neighbor,
though his call as it answers
drifts out of the world too.

*4*

Now in the same morning I awoke
I was in a different day
and there were dreams
that had strayed from another time

. . .

they seemed;

. . .

how they came with the shutters down—
but no that is not the main question
I think is
why were they pain?

*5*

Come to me small children
small in the infant morning
that sweet whim into a world
neatly tossed by a new sun
smally throws hymn-roses
over your small feet

those of the few the prone light
grows at all

in the infant morning
come to me clean children
as over all the steep lone
shadows of the night
I have been running to you

shall be seen sunning
lean and deep in the small inn
of infant morning roses.

# HAVING A TIME

by

Henry C. Meyer

The tall lieutenant who returned an enlisted man's salute with a click of his heels and a sharp salute had given him a quart of whisky for taking him and his nurse back to Lagernesse at two in the morning in such a way they did not get caught.

The looie had said, "If you want to put something over on an officer ask any enlisted man how." The looie was supposed to be great for the enlisted men and not chicken like the other officers.

A bottle of whisky cost an enlisted man two hundred krónur or thirty dollars bootleg bought from one of the merchant sailors or some Icelander who had run it in by fishing boat from England. Of course it only cost the looie a buck and a half over the bar, but it was a good gift.

Hominy put the bottle in his inside pocket so the bulge wouldn't show. It was against regulations for officers to give enlisted men whisky. He was wearing a parka and was all puffed out anyway.

"Don't get drunk now and get me in a jam with that," said the lieutenant.

"Hell, no, sir," said Hominy, "and if I do I'll tell them I got it from a civilian."

He walked down the road from the officers' quarters, feeling the bulge in his pocket and knowing he had a couple of thousand krónur from getting hot the night before in a crap game. When he got to the hut he put the bottle of whisky under his comforter so it would be safe. This whisky was for a "time" and not for sharing with the guys in the

hut who would only get a drink apiece anyway that would do no one any good.

That afternoon he kicked his two-and-a-half-ton along the crushed lava roads and even the bumps felt good. He waved at the stulkas along the road, pointing them out to the assistant driver in case he missed any. "Baby, that one's built like a brick latrine—got all her teeth, too." How many of the Icelandic maidens revealed black gaps when they smiled!

He didn't even mind when the Fishhead trucks cut him off as they tore recklessly down the road.

"Gonna have myself a time tomorrow, Joe," he said.

"Yeah," said Joe, incredulously, "how you gonna have yourself a time in this Goddamn hole?"

"Oh, I'll have myself a time, all right," and he began to hum, thinking of the bottle of whisky. Get me a stulka, he thought, and a taxi and have myself a time. Some of these stulkas were nuts about the stuff because of the prohibition. They wouldn't look at a dogface usually, but with a bottle that was different.

"Yeah, Joe," he said again as he rounded the turn to the QM at Jeffersonville, "gonna have a time."

"Don't see it," said Joe, "don't see how. I been chasing some of these stulkas for a year now and never got nowhere. And I don't care no more if they got teeth. Just so long as they got hair. Maybe after a while hair won't make no difference."

"Maybe you don't work it right."

"Maybe not. You got a stulk', Hominy?"

"No, I ain't got no stulk'—but I will tomorrow."

"Hominy, you're flippin' your lid." Joe spit some tobacco juice into the road. "You're goin' Icelandic."

Hominy just laughed because there was still the bottle there, the key to the whole tomorrow when he would get an eight-hour pass to Reykjavik.

Joe thought of Reykjavik and how many times he had wandered up and down its few streets, down the main street to the square with the clock, then over to the Tjarnbio or Lake Theater, where they had the high-brow English and Swedish films, and then to the Gamlabio, where it was always Betty Grable and Dorothy Lamour and you had to stand in line for a four-krónur ticket. Then over to the Limey "Y" for a couple of bars of Cadbury's chocolate and some fruit drops and tea.

Maybe shooting the breeze with some of the RAF ground-crew fellows who talked in funny accents it was hard to understand. Then to a *matsala* for a plate of eggs and chips, bread and margarine, some heavy cake that cost ten krónur. You sat there looking at the waitress go in and out because she was young and a little pretty and her breasts bounced when she walked . . . and there was nowhere else to go. Maybe you tried to kid her like a waitress in the States but she froze like all these Fishhead bitches froze and you got a nasty feeling like you did when you walked down a street crowded with women and when you smiled they looked the other way.

How the hell is a guy gonna have a time in a place like that?

By the time they got the laundry back to the camp it was dark. The night was taking over at four o'clock now and would come on earlier and earlier as the winter progressed.

Hominy felt the whisky bottle when he went to his hut. When no one was looking he wrapped it in his sweater and shoved it in his footlocker.

After chow he lay back on his bunk to dream and plan the glorious tomorrow, slowly puffing on a cigarette. He was tired with the day's work and ready to turn in early. Some of the fellows were playing pinochle at one end of the room, but he did not care for that—he liked a game where you won or lost your money in a hurry. "There ain't no use foolin' aroun', let's get it over," he always said.

Suddenly his dream was interrupted by the entry of the motor sergeant, who banged the door when he came in and yelled out "Hominy" like he was calling stops for a railroad train.

"What tha hell you want, Sarge?" he asked, sitting up.

"Gotta drive tonight, Hominy. Gotta pick up some stulk's at the Borg Hotel. Officers' party."

"Son of a bitch," said Hominy. "I been driving all day. I drove last night and the night before. Ain't there any more Goddamn drivers aroun' here but me?"

"They're all out," said the motor sergeant. "It's tough, but what the hell am I gonna do? This is a tough war."

"War, hell," yelled Hominy, "this is a Goddamn taxi service for a bunch of whores." He grumbled and swore. "I'll run that jeep into a ditch one of these nights. I'm sick of being a dog robber for a bunch of chicken officers."

"The Major said to hurry," said the motor sergeant.

"What's eating him? That stulk' must be driving him nuts. Next thing you know he'll be marrying her. She stinks of fish."

All the time he talked he was putting on his overshoes because, in the end, though protest might give a man relief it brought no other result because in this absolute military society nothing occurred that did not in some way benefit the officers; contributing one thing or another to their comfort or prestige.

He took a jeep up to the Major's hut and waited. One of the dog robbers came out to tell him the Major was still dressing.

"Well," he said sarcastically, "when is 'Lover' gonna be ready?"

"The little basserd is trying to hide his gray hair; he changed the part about fourteen times awready."

"What's he trying to do, make like a movie actor?"

"He's putting perfume on hisself right now."

"Perfume," laughed Hominy scornfully. "What the hell's he want that for when his stulk' smells of fish?"

"Maybe that covers it up!"

"Could be. Without the fish she ain't so bad—to look at, I mean. She sure is young, though, 'bout sixteen, I guess."

"Well, don't he allus go for kids? He ain't happy less he's old enough to be their father."

"Hope he tries to wolf aroun' the high-school kids when he gets home. He'll land his rear end in the jailhouse. Lover! She wouldn't give him another look if it wasn't for his whisky and the Goddamn jeep."

"Yeah," said the dog robber, reflectively, "maybe if I didn't have to be in by eleven o'clock and had a place to go like a dance hall or even a place to sit at a table and drink a beer I could at least have a stulk' to be with for a while."

"That's not for the Joes," Hominy said bitterly, "that's for the Johns. Put a couple bars on a guy an' he ain't human no more."

"I guess so." The dog robber swore a couple of strong oaths. "Here comes the ol' basserd now. I'll haul ass before he thinks of something for me."

"Night," said Hominy. He looked across the snow where the Major was walking, pulling on his gloves. Looks like a dog robber for a PFC, thought Hominy. I gotta get off my sack to taxi that aroun'.

"You know where I want to go?" asked the Major when he came up.

"Borg Hotel," said Hominy.

"All right, take off." The Major sat with his head slumped forward

and never said a word all the way to Reykjavik. In town he turned himself sideways so he could watch the girls on the sidewalk. They turned off at the Borg.

When the Major came back to the jeep there were two girls with him and they were both drunk. They laughed a lot, climbing into the jeep, talked to each other in Icelandic and swore in English, very strong soldier's oaths that they had heard around. The Major climbed in back with his girl. She put her arms around him and kissed him. "Not here," whispered the Major, "not now." She didn't pay any attention. The girl in front with Hominy was in a similar mood and she proceeded to bestow her kisses upon him liberally.

"Look," said Hominy, "get off me, Babe. I wanna drive this jeep. Save it until later."

The Major said, "Take off." Hominy pushed the girl away. She moved a little but left her head on his shoulder. While he traveled slowly through town he looked at her. Her hair was red and her skin was pale and to a man who had been away from home for a year and a half she looked beautiful. He leaned a little closer until he could feel her hair brushing his cheek. His heart beat so loudly he thought the Major might hear it. His breath came shorter and shorter, almost as if he had been running and he felt a little sick to his stomach.

"Sweetheart," she whispered, "lover."

"What's she saying?" asked the Major.

"I don't know," answered Hominy. "It must be Icelandic."

"Keep your eye on the road," said the Major gruffly.

They left the mile of smooth road and hit the rough, crushed lava. They drove for a long time in silence, while Hominy kept glancing down at the girl, feeling more and more angry.

I'm bringing her in for some son of a bitch and I can't get a chance to say something for myself.

Finally they reached the camp and the officers' club. She leaned over and kissed him before she got out. This made the Major angry.

"Take off," he said shortly. "I'll send the CQ when I want you."

Hominy saw her disappear inside, the first woman to kiss him in a year and a half.

"Goddamn," he said, "Goddamn, Goddamn, Goddamn." He stopped by his hut, walked in, got the bottle of whisky, and took it with him. He parked the jeep and sat in it. He lit a cigarette, took a few puffs, and threw it away.

Then he opened the bottle. He drank about a quarter of it without stopping, coughed, spluttered, felt the whisky burn.

For twenty minutes he sipped now and then until half of it was gone. He began to swear a little, then he smiled craftily because he suddenly felt that he knew something more than all of them and that he would find a way of outwitting them.

He corked the bottle, put it alongside him, lit a cigarette, and started the jeep. His hands felt thick and clumsy, but it was cold and he took deep breaths of the air and exhaled great clouds of steam and felt good. He nursed the jeep slowly along the road. The sentry did not bother to challenge him because he was used to errands the jeep drivers went on. Another Goddamn load of women, he thought, and opened the gate.

Hominy tore down the road to Reykjavik, singing and swearing as he went. He didn't know what he was going to do, but he felt the need for motion and speed to keep up with the excitement inside him. The streets were deserted now and snow had started to sift down slowly. When he got to town he cut off to the right to the docks. It was all shadows there, and the masts and rigging seemed like an impossible tangle. He slid the jeep up to the sentry box. He had a lot of friends in the Port Battalion, so he just said, "Hominy," when the sentry challenged.

"Hell," cried the sentry, "what you up to, ol' man?"

"Jus' prowlin'," answered Hominy, "lookin' for a li'l trouble."

"Good night to find some," laughed the sentry.

"Look, Mac," said Hominy, "you got any of that stuff?"

"What stuff ya talkin' about?" The sentry feigned ignorance.

"Ya got any whisky? I got the krónur, Mac."

"No, I ain't."

"Know anybody what has?"

"No. Too long since the last boat got in. It's on'y when the boats are in we got whisky."

Hominy snorted. "I sure could use some of that stuff. I sure could."

"Well," said the sentry, "I got some torpedo juice. You want some torpedo juice?"

"Hell, yes," answered Hominy, "I'd drink AquaVelva tonight. How much ya want?"

"Same thing. Two hunnerd krónur. O.K. with you?"

"That's a hell of a price for torpedo juice."

"Take it or leave it," said the sentry.

"I'll take it."

The sentry left the box and walked to a shed. He came back in a few seconds with a bottle. He passed the grain alcohol to Hominy. Hominy pulled out the krónur and paid off.

"So long, Mac." Hominy gunned the motor and was off. He stopped near the West Quay for a minute and took a good pull at the whisky bottle, then he turned off and headed for the NAAFI. On the way he passed some girls walking. He slowed down and yelled, "Hey, stulka!" and waved the half-empty bottle at them, but they turned their heads and looked the other way.

When he got near the NAAFI he saw some girls standing in the shadow of the building, which was just what he expected. He heard them laughing when he slowed down. He pulled up alongside of them.

"Hey, stulk'," he said, "you like whisky?"

"Skillagee," one answered.

"You skillagee all right," he said, "kom to heen gath."

She came over. He took out the bottle and showed it to her. She put out her hands for it and he pulled it away.

"You come with me and you get whisky," he said.

She laughed and showed that some of her front teeth were missing. She looked about thirty. Her hair straggled untidily alongside her face.

"No," she said, "no, soldier, I don't go with you."

"Oh, you do skillagee." Hominy was triumphant. "Get in the jeep and we will ride." The other girls looked on and said nothing but giggled every now and then as if something very funny was happening.

She looked at the bottle again.

"What's your name, *elska mein*?" he asked.

"Helca," she said. "You got whisky in there, soldier?"

"Sure," he answered, took the cork out and let her smell. Without saying a word she climbed into the jeep.

"Good stulka, good——" he pressed the accelerator, waved to her girl friends, and headed out of town. As they were going along he handed her the bottle. She drank all that was left and threw the bottle into the street. Hominy laughed. He gave her the bottle of alcohol.

"Catch up with me, Babe, take a good drink."

She took a pull on the bottle, choked, and spit it out.

"No good, no Goddamn good," she yelled. She was going to toss it into the road when he grabbed her arm.

"Good!" he cried. "Good. I jus' gotta cut it with something. We'll stop off at Mom's Café and get some applesin. That oughta do the trick."

He did not continue on the main road to Mom's Café but turned left at the road block into the new development of concrete houses being built for the Icelanders who had flocked to the capital to work for the Americans. When he got to the top of the long hill he turned left toward Lagernesse. In the dark untraveled road he pulled up.

"Whisky," she said, "more whisky!"

"No whisky now," he answered, "whisky later!"

He put his arm around her shoulders. She pulled herself away. His hand slid to the middle of her back. He caught hold of her collar and pulled at it. She hit at his face with both hands when he leaned toward her.

"What you want—what you want?" she asked in a choked voice.

He tried to say something, but his voice was shut off by a thickness in his throat. He hardly felt the beating of her fists on his forehead and cheeks and chin—he was aware only of the softness of her hair and the sparse fur of her collar. He crowded closer until she could hit at him no longer. She panted and gasped. He tore at the front of her coat, but quick movements of her hands prevented him from achieving his aim. She started to argue, but her English deserted her, and all he heard distantly was a stream of Icelandic that meant nothing to him.

In his drunkenness he never thought of her at all, not as a person anyway, but as something he had promised himself and which he was determined to have in the face of all the disappointments and frustrations that had been the total of his existence since he had landed upon this island.

In her struggling, squirming, and pleading form was embodied the arrogance of all the people who had spurned him when he had put forth, out of his deep longing, the tentative overtures necessary to establish even the most rudimentary companionship. Now he had them all here, at his mercy, and he was determined to fight them into submission.

He repeated "Stulk'," "stulk' " over and over again, more in admonishment than in pleading, as though to warn her of the dangerous thing he had become. At last they were compressed into a tight struggling knot. When he thrust his hand beneath her skirt she seized it and in a move too quick for him to prevent bit him to the bone. He cried out, cursed, beat her savagely about the head.

Suddenly he became aware of what he was doing. He slowly withdrew to the driver's seat, leaving a wide space between them. His breath was spurting from his nostrils in great puffs of steam, rapidly and regularly,

as though from the exhaust of an engine. He looked at her staring eyes, her straggling hair, the ugliness of her terror. This was what had become of his "time." He leaned his head upon the wheel and began to cry.

The woman looked at him and said nothing. Something was going on that she could not understand. For a moment she had been (she knew) on the verge of something terrible, possibly death; now her assailant was crying. She began to weep, too; because she was relieved, because he was weeping, because of the whisky.

She was the first to stop crying because she had less reason for tears. She leaned forward and looked at him carefully. Touching the drops trickling down his cheeks, she asked, "Why?"

He shook his head and said nothing; there was too much revolving in his head for him to explain. She leaned against him then, placed her head sympathetically on his shoulder. Then she reached up and, placing her hand on his cheek, drew his head down so she could kiss him on the mouth.

Her lips were open and moist. Hominy put his arms around her and was not repulsed.

After a while they resumed the interrupted journey to Mom's Café in search of the applesin to cut the torpedo juice.

Mom's Café was a large shed that served as a lunchroom where eggs and chips, hamburgers made of pony meat and mutton, and applesin and Icelandic beer could be procured. It was a mile and a half from Reykjavik and its clientele was almost one hundred per cent GI. Hominy got there in a matter of minutes and pulled the jeep up in front. He put the bottle in his pocket and pushed the girl out.

"Can't leave you in, honey. The MP's might see you."

Inside there were some medics from Camp Harley Street and a Norwegian soldier in British battle dress with the shoulder patch "Norge" to show his nationality. The medics were shoveling down eggs and chips and the Norwegian was drinking the nonalcoholic Icelandic beer.

Hominy lurched across the room with the girl.

Mom was standing at the little counter that stood between the kitchen and the dining room. She had a wall eye that stared coldly and a brusque manner that went with it. She served her customers as though she despised them.

"Goddamn, Mom," yelled Hominy, feeling dizzy in the warmth of the room, "give me twelve bottles applesin in a hurry."

"You wait," she said severely, "other people first."

Hominy looked around belligerently. He saw the maroon and white piping on the garrison caps.

"Oh," he muttered, "Goddamn pill rollers. Gotta wait for the Goddamn pill rollers. If that ain't the end of the line."

One of the medics stood up.

"Who tha hell ya calling pill roller, Bud?" he asked.

"You, Doc, you!" said Hominy, turning around. "Wanta make something of it?"

Just then the Norwegian came over to the stulka. He said a few words to her fast in Icelandic and she answered fast and it sounded like she was swearing. It appeared evident that they knew each other very well. The Norwegian grabbed her by the arm and spoke fiercely.

Hominy turned on him.

"You leave that girl alone," he said to the Norwegian. "She's with me."

The medic was pushing some chairs out of the way to get to Hominy.

The Norwegian continued to talk fast. Helca, without saying another word, picked up a bottle from the counter and began belaboring the Norwegian. The Norwegian jumped back and landed against the chairs the medic was pushing. As he fell he pulled a knife from his sleeve. Hominy grabbed at the girl's arm and pulled her for the door as the Norwegian jumped to his feet and slashed at the girl's face with the knife. She screamed loudly.

The blood appeared so suddenly and shockingly that Hominy just stood gaping, unable to understand what was happening. At that moment the medic swung with a chair and brought it down with a loud crack on the Norwegian's skull, felling him to the floor. The girl darted into a corner and started to cry and shriek. Mom joined in the screaming so that Hominy felt as though the world were being torn apart to the accompaniment of horrible outcries.

"Let's get the hell outa here before we get in a jam," yelled one of the medics. They all started for the door, pushing the dazed Hominy to one side. For a moment his alcohol-laden brain ceased functioning, then sweat broke out all over him and he ran for the door. He pounded over to the jeep, fumbled with the ignition, pressed the starter several times, thought the motor would never start. Finally it did, and he sprawled out onto the road and took off as rapidly as the vehicle would go. The snow was coming down fast and he could see the road but indistinctly. He passed a few two-and-a-halfs. The drivers yelled at him as he shaved them close. He skidded a few times.

He still had the scene in his mind of the flashing knife and the sudden appearance of the blood. Why it happened, how it happened, he didn't know, but it was something to get away from and to get away from fast. Never for a moment had he considered his destination. He had thought of flight and flight only. He began to shiver as the wind hit him and he began to feel sick. Before he got to the road to Baldershagge he tried to pull off as his whole stomach started to climb into his throat. The vehicle spun sideways, the wheel whipped in his hand. He wrenched at it but got no result. Before he had another chance the jeep plowed onto the snow, one side dropped deep into the abyss, and he was thrown clear as the vehicle landed on its side.

For a moment he knew nothing but the terrible intensity of a white light burning behind his eyes, then the cold wetness of the snow made itself felt upon his face. He sat up. He knew he was unhurt but he began to shake and then to retch violently. In a few minutes he felt a little better, though weak.

He walked over to the jeep that lay like an injured beast.

He put his head down on the cold metal and began to cry.

This was the second time he had cried that night, he who had not cried for years.

The sum of his crimes began to loom up before him. Absent without leave and a wrecked vehicle. He thought of the stockade and the dreary lines of its barbed-wire fences stretching across the snow. He was still drunk in that everything felt thick and the ground under his feet twisted slightly, but the exhilaration was gone and a stark depression had hold of him.

"It's their Goddamn fault," he muttered. "If it hadn't been for them and their women and their party I woulda had myself a time." Now there was no tomorrow to which to look forward. The wind began to push him more vigorously and the snow sifted behind his collar and wet the back of his neck.

Out of the darkness two long beams of light cut like knives through the eddying snow and spotted him. He did not move.

"Hey, Joe," a voice cried out, "you got trouble?"

"Yeah," he answered half to himself, "yeah, I got trouble."

A winch job pulled alongside.

A couple of parka-clad GI's jumped down. They looked at the jeep.

"You all right, fella?" asked one.

"Yeah," said Hominy, "yeah, I'm all right."

"So is the jeep," said another. "Let's get a hold on it."

They all grabbed on it, rocked it a few times, and set it up on its wheels. The right fender was crumpled slightly; otherwise there were no signs of the accident.

"Thanks a million, fellows," said Hominy.

"Nothin' at all," said the driver. "You're a lucky son of a bitch."

"Yeah," said Hominy reflectively, "I sure am."

He pressed the starter and the jeep responded immediately. He turned on to the road and was off. When he got to his gate the sentry had changed.

"What's the time?" Hominy asked.

"Eleven o'clock."

Hominy whistled. He pulled the jeep up near his hut and got out. In his hut everyone was asleep. He walked in softly and sat in front of the stove. He lit a cigarette. He heard the sound of shoes crunching in the snow. The outer door slammed. His room was lit by a flashlight.

"Hominy!" It was the CQ. "You ready to go?"

Hominy looked around slowly; slowly expelled the smoke from his lungs. He sighed.

"Yeah," he said slowly, "yeah, I'm ready to go."

# THE NEWBORN

by

Theodore Wilson

HINZELMAN had gone to see the road boss the day before, to get permission to postpone working out his poll tax till another time.

"My Jersey heifer," he had told the road boss carefully, as if he had composed the sentences beforehand, "she's gonna come fresh, her first calf. She got bred too young and she's small too. She might have a hard time. So I'd like to get off, please, till next time."

But the road boss, hard-boiled from years of listening to the weird excuses these foreigners put up, had shaken his head and said gruffly, " 'Fraid not, Mister. You'd better be on the job tomorrow like the notice said."

And Hinzelman, used to being submissive to the voice of authority, had not dared to protest. He had been tempted to add, "My vife, she's gonna have a baby too, tomorrow or next day," but he had restrained himself. That was the lesser excuse, and bound to fail if the other one had. Women, Hinzelman knew, needed no help from the men when they had their babies. But heifers, when they had been bred too young, they sometimes did.

Hinzelman harnessed his team to the wagon and went to work the next day, as the notice had ordered him to do. It was late fall, and so far the weather had been mild. The forenoon was clear and reasonably warm. Good weather for the heifer to have her calf. But during the afternoon it got cloudy, and a wind sprang up out of the north. A couple of hours before quitting time it began to rain, a chill drizzle that dampened the men's backs and shoulders. Hinzelman, when quitting time came, said hopefully, "Maybe on account of the vedder ve don't vork tomor-

row, no?" But the road boss said, "We work if it ain't a lot worse than it is now, Mister."

Hinzelman drove home slowly through the drizzle, hoping that when he arrived he would find the birth over and the calf safely born. He feared that the weather was going to turn cold and be bad for a week or more. It was getting that time of year.

Before he unhitched the team he went into the barn to see how things were. It hadn't happened yet. The heifer, her sides swollen, stood in her stall. There was a droop to her head that Hinzelman didn't like, but he tried to believe that it was because the labor was about to commence. Chances were he'd have to get up during the night and see to her.

He unharnessed the team, led them to water, and put them in the stable. He grained them and pitched them some hay. Then he brought the heifer a bucket of fresh water and put it where she could drink without moving.

He went into the house, where Freyda was busy getting supper. Freyda was his wife's youngest sister. She had come over from the old country with Anna two years before, to be bridesmaid at her sister's wedding and to live with Anna and her husband till she too married. Already a dependable young farmer was paying her court, but she put on airs and was persistently cool toward him. When Hinzelman reproached her for what he termed her foolishness she became stubborn and said she didn't want to marry a farmer, because they were so coarse. This usually stung Hinzelman to an indignant self-defense, and for a time the fur would fly between them, till Anna, sedate and matronly in her position as a farmer's wife, poured the oil of her mild reproof upon their troubled waters. But Hinzelman liked Freyda, approved of her presence. She was a real help about the house, especially in times like these. He gave her a friendly glance as he came in, and as he removed his coat he said, "Well, it hasn't happened yet, Freyda." She misunderstood him, and shook her head without looking. "No," she said, "it hasn't happened yet. She has gone to bed." Hinzelman chuckled at the fact that they were speaking of different things, and to tease her he said, "Oh, no, Freyda, not to bed. The last I saw of her she stood in her stall, and I put a pailful of water in front of her, but she didn't drink."

"Your stock," Freyda said sulkily, "that's all you think of."

Among themselves they spoke their native tongue. Neither Freyda nor Anna had learned to speak English even as awkwardly as Hinzelman spoke it.

Freyda and Hinzelman ate alone, for the most part in silence, and afterwards Freyda took a small tray with broth and bread on it to the wife. Hinzelman went out to see if the heifer were having her calf yet, not because he really thought she might be—he hadn't heard her bawl—but because he was restless and apprehensive. Going through the gate he met Freyda's suitor, and they went on out to the barn together.

The cow still stood in the stall. She shivered a little, and in the light of the lantern her eyes had a staring look, as if she saw something beyond them. When Hinzelman put some grain in the little box at the side of her stall she ate it greedily, and the kernels cracked in her mouth.

"She can still eat," the young man said with a light laugh.

"Yes," said Hinzelman, "she can still eat."

They went back into the house. Freyda came into the kitchen with the empty tray as they came through the door.

"She can still eat," the young man said, "so I think she will be all right."

"Yes," Freyda assented, "she ate all I gave her. But her stomach is so delicate these days." She flushed when the two men laughed.

"It was the heifer I meant, not Sister Anna," the young man explained. It was a good joke, but Freyda gave them both angry looks and said nothing.

"I hope it happens tonight," said Hinzelman. "I have to work tomorrow again, all day."

"If it does," said Freyda tartly, "see that you be quiet about it. Unless Anna needs me I don't want to be disturbed."

"If it happens to one it will happen to both," Hinzelman said dogmatically. "Always it is like that. They happen together, when they are as close together in their times as those two are." He puffed moodily at his pipe. "Somehow," he went on, "it—communicates itself." And he concluded helplessly, as if he had been asked for an explanation, "I don't know why."

"Superstition," scorned Freyda, as if she were above it. And when the young man protested, "Maybe not," she turned the scorn of her eyes against the conciliating glow in his, and he subsided, and let her have it as she would without further debate.

After a few minutes Hinzelman went out to the barn again, and remained idly out there for a half-hour or so, to give Freyda and her young man the privacy of the kitchen. With his wife ill as she was he didn't care to go into the other room, for fear of disturbing her or of having to

listen to her complaints. During the interval the heifer remained unchanged. Now and then she moved her head in the light of the lantern and her eyes shone like green ice, and a sort of trapped desperation thickened her breath to a barely audible moan.

At last he went in. Freyda and the young man were sitting on opposite sides of the kitchen table. She looked aloof, disdaining him perhaps. He leaned his head on one rough hand and there was an expression of bafflement in the look he turned on Hinzelman as the latter came in.

"The cat," he announced ruefully, "has taken Freyda's tongue tonight."

"Cats have no use for such baggage," Hinzelman grunted after he had blown the flame from the wick. "What she needs is a strap across her backside."

Freyda gasped, and arose. The young man flushed, and stifled an embarrassed grin, but said only, "No more signs yet, in the heifer?"

"None."

"Well," the young man arose with a sigh, "I'd better go now, I think. I hope it will turn out well." He distributed his hope impartially between Freyda and her brother-in-law, but only the latter accepted it, with a mutter that he hoped so too. "She's so young," he said morosely, "and so small." He raised a hand in a gesture that might have meant anything but optimism, but which didn't quite signify despair, and said:

"Good night."

He passed into the other room, where Anna greeted him with a murmur of misery, in a voice that expressed without words an inarticulate feeling of reproach that he could do nothing to help her.

Gruffly he said, "If you think it will happen soon I will go get the woman myself, now." But she said she didn't quite know. This baby coming to her in her middle age distressed her as much with the uncertainty of what to expect as with the actual pain. "I don't know," she murmured, "but I think . . . Oh, I don't know."

Her husband grunted, and took off his shoes, placing them carefully on the floor so they wouldn't thump. He undressed and climbed into his side of the bed and burrowed his ear into the pillow. He heard his wife's irregular breathing, which caught now and then as if she were going to speak, and it reminded him of the way the heifer had done when he had been in the barn a few minutes ago.

Sometime during the night he awoke. The wind, which had settled with sunset, had risen again, and it was strong enough in its blustering

around the house to subdue all other sounds. He thought that if the heifer did have her calf in this tumult he might not hear her bawling. So he got up. He dressed carefully to avoid waking his wife, and was startled when she spoke out of the darkness, asking him querulously what he was going to do now.

"I just want to go out and look around," he said. "I won't be gone long." He went out into the kitchen and lighted the lantern. Then he put on his coat and cap and went out.

Nothing had changed, save that the heifer was lying down. She chewed her cud haphazardly, and she still moaned uncomfortably under her breath. He went back to the house and to bed.

He got up as soon as the alarm rang, and went out without even lighting a fire in the kitchen stove. When he came back disappointed Freyda had the fire going, but she asked nothing about what he had found, or what had happened during the night. And he was too deep in his abstraction to tell her. Till after breakfast as he was about to leave for work, when he said:

"You might look in at the heifer once in a while while I'm gone. Not that you could do anything, but——"

She interrupted him. "I shall look after Anna," she said. "Your heifer can look out for herself."

Hinzelman looked at her darkly and went out. He passed the midwife's on the way to work, and told her that perhaps she had better go up to his house along toward noon.

The day was unendurably long. Hinzelman worked hard, trying to forget how the minutes dragged. And despite the damp chill of the cloudy day he kept in a sweat that was in part due to apprehension, the worry that something would go wrong that his presence might have served to avert.

Noon came, and he ate automatically, with an unpleasant dryness in his mouth. He worked again, trying to immerse himself in it that it might the sooner be over. It grew colder, and the drizzle set in again. The clouds thickened and the air smelled like snow.

At last the day ended. His poll tax was paid, and he quit with the feeling of having been long restrained against his will, as if it had been months rather than hours. But his team couldn't be urged too much—they had worked hard the past two days—and he stood with an enforced patience while the wagon lurched slowly ahead. The winter twilight, made darker by the dense, cold clouds, was almost an enveloping fog

when he drove at last through the barnyard gate. He saw the lighted windows of the house, in both rooms tonight, but paid them no attention. Their possible significance was lost, overborne by another concern. Again he left the team hitched to the wagon, and hurried into the barn. He lighted the lantern, clumsily, with fingers that were all thumbs, and looked.

The heifer was humped up. Her sides were convulsing, in brief agitations, as if something were lashing about between them. She groaned softly, in small bursts of sound that seemed extorted from her by the vicious spasms of pain. Hinzelman hurried around to the next aisle, behind her, and saw that the calf's forefoot had already emerged. It moved out a few inches whenever she strained, but always dropped back when she relaxed. He feared that this had been going on for hours, and he didn't like the look of it. The caul had burst, and the labor would likely be hard. He felt helpless, and stood undecided while the effort went on—great paroxysms that almost made him cry out in sympathy. But always the foot moved back when the effort ceased. The fact that the caul had burst was what bothered him most. With the caul intact the labor would have been easier. But now perhaps it had gone as far as it could go by itself, and something would have to be done. He breathed hoarsely, wondering. Again the heifer cried out, and her sides convulsed. The forefoot emerged almost to the knee, and slid back.

Hinzelman hurried out to the tool shed and came back with a block and tackle. He anchored it to an upright that supported the roof, and lashed the hook securely to the projecting forefoot. There was an unnatural twist to his face, a sort of fixed, demonic leer, as he set himself. He was cringing, but he held himself rigid. When the heifer heaved again he took up the slack, and held the calf from receding. . . . As the labor went on he felt as if he were being suffocated. His clothes bound him like a straitjacket, and he gulped for air. Every time the cow bellowed the sound inundated him, beat at him so that he had to fight against the impulse to give up and run outdoors. Gritting his teeth, he held his ground, like a man who must endure a torment to achieve peace.

It was at this moment that Freyda entered the barn, possessed of an agitation of her own. When she came into the light of the lantern she screamed. Hinzelman, looking at her with twisted face and obsessed eyes, was intent on the terrible thing he was having to do, and when she fled he barely noticed her. The calf, he saw, was about to come. The heifer's bawling had stopped: there was a momentary lull, as for a concentration

of effort, and then the calf came free. It seemed to unwind swiftly downward like a glistening dark cable. Something that resembled its shadow fell away from it, and Hinzelman, confused by the great tumult in his mind, thought that it was the shadow, for it and the calf struck the floor together. He dropped the rope and stood stiffly for a moment, trying to realize that it was over. The sweat streamed from his face, and his clothes were clammy with it. He blinked the drops of sweat from his eyes and noticed the heifer: she stood in a sort of peace, with her head down. He had seen animals look that way when they were going to die. Wearily he bent over the calf, certain already that it was dead. The film of the caul glistened in the lantern light, but the calf never moved.

Then Hinzelman saw what it was that had fallen. It was a skeleton, barely clothed in raw flesh, with the undeveloped legs like naked sticks and the head nothing but a skull. The heifer had conceived twins, but had been unable to nourish them both to life. The one had died early, and thereafter it had poisoned both the heifer and the twin, till the latter had died too. And the heifer might die. Hinzelman looked at her with stricken eyes. She made no move to attend to the calf. She just stood, shivering and drawing deep, irregular breaths. With gentle, quiet movement Hinzelman got her a pail of water and put a quantity of grain in her box, but she ignored them both. He saw the emerald glare of her eyes as he picked up the lantern to go out.

He attended to the horses, and went to the house. When he entered the kitchen he found Freyda seated beside the stove, crying. She tossed her head at him, and he saw that her eyes were swollen.

"Well?" he said hoarsely.

"It was born dead," she told him, as if it were something he deserved.

Puzzled for the moment, he muttered, "How did you know?" Then he remembered the brief sight of her horrified face while he had been in the barn.

"Yes," he admitted bitterly, "it was born dead. And the heifer will die too, I think."

# THE PEOPLE ON THE SCREENED PORCH

by

David Cornel DeJong

The sun kept trying, but again and again the heavy clouds mastered it. The three people on the porch coughed a little, almost simultaneously. Whatever color there was to their view seemed now merely a rather difficult memory of other days. The brown-gray path ended on the green-gray opaqueness of sky, but suddenly they watched with some relief a bluejay flying across it, as if it, almost with conscious purpose, was trying to give the sky some substance. Immediately the little girl, whom they'd already watched eight times before, came from around the first corner again. There were further corners, too, the people on the porch reminded themselves, surprised that they hadn't realized it before.

The little girl's head was too large for her body, George decided again grimly, now buffeting that pleased look on Emily's face, which spoke as with well-formed, firm letters: Oh, but isn't she cute, isn't she really, even though . . . It was only Ronney who pleaded with some anonymous, nonexistent being: Oh, don't let her cross my line of vision again. Keep her from making a mockery of everything that is so marvelously solemn and portentous. At least Emily thought Ronney might be praying something of the kind. Men were apt to be gauche when emotional, she hazarded.

The little girl kept coming. She was swinging a stick. Her arm with the stick became a pendulum increased to idiotic intensity. Then the selfsame dog started following the little girl again, in the selfsame humble fashion, across the anthole-pitted grass. Behind those two all the walls and gables loomed more actual now, not spaced, nor in perspective, but

seemingly sunk into the surface of that sky, like too-dry paint. Only the windows looked lacquered, while all the spare trees acted bated, as if they had been loosely attached to the scene, in a faulty montage fashion.

The three people sighed when the child and her dog disappeared again, but then the bluejay fluttered in sight once more. They leaned forward on the porch, waiting for the girl to follow, but when nothing happened they sipped in relief from their glasses. The beer was too cold, George groused. Against all three the beer smells lay flat, approximately neck-high, a stratum of hop smells, so terribly solid that it ought to be visible. Emily wiped her lips. George lighted a limp cigarette, and then broke the match into four pieces. "Against forest fires," he said.

Ronney shook his head ruefully. "Take cats now," he said, "they do, of course, and they aren't even immortal, unless . . ." The unfinished, suspended sentence made both George and Emily lean forward, anxiously studying the thirsty lawn. "But give a cat a chance, and she will keep her first mate for life. It's a proven fact," Ronney finished the sentence petulantly. For a moment there was no other sound than that of Ronney's glass clattering down upon the brass coaster, and then thunder, like smothered animal coughing, came from the east.

"No, not really, why, of all things," Emily cried brightly, the way she liked to hear herself. "Love *is* wonderful, but cats now!"

"For Christ's sake," George grumbled.

Then at last the sun shoved victoriously through the clouds, as if behind the clouds it had performed some necromantic obvolution, which science had better not observe or nothing would remain stable or believable. The sun picked out a row of scarlet flowers and accented them unmercifully. Ronney suddenly wanted to tell Emily the name of those flowers, but when the sun scudded away, he immediately lost interest. But Emily said dutifully, even with some commiseration: "No, don't tell me. They're salvias, of course."

"In July?" George snorted. "Dumb." He peered truculently into his empty glass.

"But pretty, so pretty," Emily purred, flexing her red fingernails, as if she were a kitten. But the world sat in stiff design again, posing, as for a badly conceived tapestry, with the gray path in its direct center. The path needed Hobbema trees, but it had none. There was some grass, some pieces of hedge, some stucco and wooden walls, and one curtain flapping now from an open window. "Very, very pretty," Emily gushed. "Did you ever paint it, Ronney, dear?"

"Always," Ronney said importantly.

Soon, however, the little girl with the big head came back, this time through one of the broken hedges, carrying a red tin shovel. "I can't stand it," Ronney said. "If it were only time now to go inside. That is . . ." But the others kept their eyes stubbornly on the dog, which came very sluggishly into view. The girl disappeared behind a morsel of hedge. The dog scampered after her. The yard was empty.

"Well, did you ever!" Emily cried.

"Always," Ronney answered. "But she's really such a dear. And she does remind one of the dear lost days."

"Local showers, wind shift to the west, the paper said," George said weightily, studying the closed sky.

"But what is local?" Ronney asked testily. "If this is, then other places aren't and vice versa."

"Oh, but you are so logical," Emily beamed at him, but she patted George's knee, digging in her carmine nails, waiting with benign merriment until George winced.

Wincing, George closed his eyes, but if he kept his eyes closed, reality came back, thrown forcibly upon the screen of his mind. He preferred the unreality of the actual scene, there beyond the screen. Cautiously he sniffed at the heavy smells of the Japanese lilies and the tuberoses. The scents came out of the house, through the open window behind them. He opened his eyes hurriedly, upon Ronney filling their glasses, upon Ronney's saying, "Now, the other day I was reading. Where was it now, the *Post,* or the *Reader's Digest,* or maybe *Collier's?*"

"We honestly don't know, do we, George?" Emily asked.

"At any rate, it was a piece about a man who had killed himself by hanging himself from a flagpole. But you wouldn't read such things in those magazines, would you? Anyway, it said that it was his conscience that had made him do it. It does sound farfetched, though. A college lad, in an orange sweater, doing that . . . but not then hanging from a flagpole, hanging there . . ."

"Where?" Emily demanded.

"There, of course," George said, pointing at a horizontal flagpole on the house from which the curtain flagged.

"Oh, life, what is life, except a complicated preparation for death? So why should you add flagpoles?" Ronney protested.

But Emily's interest in George had suddenly flared up again. She suspected all the flower odors. Her need and desire for him welled up high

and her eyes brimmed over with it. She pressed her knees hard together, and tried to swallow her irreverent desires with her beer. Because they were here to mourn, and to atone, and also more or less to comfort Ronney. And not mentally to go to bed with each other. But George had noticed her, and now his hand reached out for her. He came poaching, desiring, grabbing. "Oh, all right, all right, but later, you fool," she said.

"Yes," Ronney echoed. "Later." There suddenly the little girl crossed the yard again. "This is too much," Ronney cried. This time the girl was wearing a pink bonnet. The dog had stopped to bite himself just above his stub tail. The bluejay sat somewhere scolding. This time the little girl walked with adult purpose right through the hedge, but the dog, yelping, flew around it.

"She is cute, though," Emily cried, feeling collected again.

"I tell you it's too much," Ronney countered.

"If it would only rain," George protested.

Ronney jumped up. "I know, your glass needs filling, George. Why say rain when you want beer! You've already had fourteen, but . . ."

"Don't rub it in," George said.

"Oh, now, no fighting now. No arguments now," Ronney cried in a hurt voice. "How do we know she isn't listening? She is cold, and her blood has stopped coursing through her, and they've pressed her eyelids down, making of her a closed book, but why couldn't she be listening?" He pointed his thumb over his shoulder, at the open window behind them.

"Never mind, Ronney," Emily smiled. "George always gets a little tight on fourteen bottles. Men with muscle do."

"Cut it out," George protested. But he didn't dare to shut his eyes again. He stared hard at that solid cement sky. The beer smells were mixing with those of the flowers. Large raindrops started flopping upon the sandy path, making dark cups, also making sounds like spitting into hot ashes. The bluejay flew away. "Virginia May!" a woman's voice screamed. "Virginia May!"

"That would be the little girl?" Emily asked.

"Yes," Ronney said. "But it's awful with her listening, but not able to awaken."

"Is that child going to cross the yard again?" George asked eagerly. "But Ronney says if she does . . ."

"Why, of course, dear. She'll cross the yard again," Emily said consolingly.

While the two men started waiting, tense with expectation, Emily thought: Oh, men. Men, they haven't got a woman's objective reality. Shall I tell them that, or keep it a secret?

Among the rain-glossed grass ants made scurryings. Again and again the woman screamed: "Virginia May! Virginia May!"

"She can't keep that up," Ronney said avidly. "She's already weakening, notice? She'll ruin . . ."

The rain poured, hummed, and streaked; now the world was uncomfortably half erased. Someone seen distantly pulled the flagging curtain inside and closed the window. This time the dog appeared first, and the little girl followed very slowly, crying because the rain was making her pink dress red. "Oh, but she's a darling," Emily cried, not daring to look at George and Ronney now.

"Shut up, you. Shut up," the little girl yelled.

"Oh, but she doesn't mean that, really. She's so young, and so innocent," Emily persisted, uneasily, because the smells of the flowers behind her had started to push her as with invisible arms toward the screen and the rain. If she let herself go now, she'd be as foolish as any man.

"Oh, shut up," the little girl screamed.

"How can she get away with that?" George asked. "The brat."

"But she does," Ronney answered solemnly. "She does, and now she's starting to dig a grave, right here in our, I beg your pardon, my yard." He looked anxiously back at the open window. "And maybe she's listening. Maybe she knows."

George's face reddened. Emily jumped up and pressed herself against the screen. The flower smells, especially the lilies, came sliding up her back now, sliding like George's hands could. "In memoriam," she whispered under her breath. "Oh, but once the smell of death and the guilt of the grave and the coffin is worn off him, he'll be mine, all mine." Loudly she cried: "But, yes, that little girl, that awful little girl, she is digging. She's digging a grave."

"Naturally, my dear," Ronney said in a sepulchral voice.

"Oh, George, look. No, George, don't look," Emily cried, pointing. Because the little girl had dug way down now. In another moment you would only be able to see her head and the sand she shoveled out. The dog had given up and lay supine. Or perhaps dead. The rain kept streaming, and the woman kept wailing, "Virginia May," very hoarsely now.

It was then that Ronney said quietly: "I think we're all in the proper frame of mind now to look at her."

George got up, and Emily squared her shoulders to turn and face it. "We'd love to, of course, Ronney," she cried.

Bobbing his head understandingly, Ronney walked ahead of them into the flower-scented room. Odd, but she hadn't actually believed that she had been lying there behind their backs all the time, Emily thought, trying hard again to surrender herself to disbelief. But George, poor George, because he was male, and actually so objective, he must have known all the time. He was so rational, so undevious. Well, it was almost over now. But George shouldn't have carried his glass of beer with him, nor should he deposit it now on the lid of the coffin, she fretted.

They first studied the great layer of flowers, as if they were horticulturists. Only obliquely did their eyes sidle to Faith's face. Polished it was, waxed, also powdered somewhat, and scented and aloof, like a relative in a tinted photograph. But already Ronney had started officiating. Stroking Faith's hair—was it dead, too?—Ronney said gently: "Pretty, so pretty."

George picked up his glass, but before he could put it to his lips, Emily hung her arm heavily through his, while Ronney kept making his remarks. Very fortunately, she thought, she soon couldn't hear Ronney's remarks any longer. They had been too fitting, too tightly fitting. They now evaporated behind her wry smile, while she anchored all her feelings into George's muscles tightening beneath her fingers. When George wagged his head, she wagged hers. Sometimes, awfully, Ronney's remarks burrowed through again, with the scents. They were wagging remarks, with woodchuck teeth, baring: "And she said to me, Rocky, you know she always called me Rocky, never Ronney, perhaps because I am so little like a rock, and have so little hardness. So she said, Rocky, dear, if I die, see to it that I die like I have lived, beautifully, and not very faithfully. Because you've been so patient, Rocky, so you may as well remain so beyond the grave. Oh, so long-suffering, Rocky, and never disobedient, are you, Rocky?"

He stopped to stroke Faith's hair again. "She understands me, you know. And I am obedient, and I'm letting her be dead as she was alive. When she was alive, you helped her, didn't you, George? But now you don't dare, do you, George? Muscular men don't. Because you'd have to die too, of course, wouldn't you, George?"

Ronney shrugged elaborately, smiled briefly at Emily, but wagged a coy finger at George. "Ah, she told me to talk brightly after she was dead, because she might be listening. I'd much rather sob, of course. And

I want to jump up and run to the porch and crowd against the screen as you did a little while ago, Emily. But I am Rocky. But when George took Faith, I couldn't take you, Emily, because that's another man's logic. So then George had you both." He started sobbing. "But Lordy, isn't she beautiful now, and all mine, and inviolable?"

"Oh, beautiful," Emily whispered, because there was no doubt about it now, Faith was listening. And clinging desperately to George's arm helped so little now, even clinging forgivingly.

"Come, let's get out of here," Ronney said. "You'd prefer that, wouldn't you, George? Not you, Emily, because your tears will wipe this all away." He hurried onto the porch again, and they followed. The rain had stopped and the sun stood blood red upon the flowers. Ronney pushed the screen door open and hurried down the damp patch. Again they followed. The little girl was watching them, but that hole she had dug was very small after all, perhaps for a doll. Ants scurried past it, and the dog sat by, wagging his tail. George's face has become pinched around his almost too prominent nose. Big nose, big potency, Emily tried to remind herself desperately, submerging then into the realization of what the two men were going to do to each other. "Keep it clean," she said facetiously, but her voice talked simply within her.

But what could she do? Now that Faith was listening, and Faith was thinking with her dead thoughts: How will Emily carry this off? With how much nonchalance, for instance?

The outdoor silence seemed to be sucking them all into its vortex. Soon someone would have to speak up, or else. The little girl stood watching them with hostile fascination, the dog had started cowering, and the bluejay screamed frantically. All that mere sound wasn't enough, she knew. There was that big question to be answered: How will Emily carry this off, with her wide-rimmed hat with yellow grapes upon it, her ruby smile, her Ipana teeth, her fingers cramped, her bowels locked, her conscience rampant?

Ronney shifted again, so that now his back was completely turned toward her. "But she," Emily pleaded, tugging at his sleeve, "this little girl, get her out of the way. Supposing she understands?"

"She understands all right," Ronney said. "That's why she keeps digging graves."

George planted himself more firmly on the moist grass, his strong legs apart, sturdily. Both men stood poised, with their flesh drawn tightly over their bones, like water-color paper stretching. They put on hard

smiles, and the smiles became permanent. Ronney said slowly: "But I have already said it, George. Even a cat will stick to one mate. George, now that she's dead, why don't you leave life alone?"

"Ronney," Emily said in an afternoon-bridge cultured voice, because Faith was listening. Her long-suffering-understanding was going to be like a new purse, one she'd be swinging a little, not jauntily, but . . .

"You be still, Emily," George said.

Suddenly the little girl crowded closer. "Give it to him, you lug. Give it to him. Lam it into him; ram it down his stinking throat, kick the livin' guts outa the jerk," she goaded.

"Yes, go on, and do as she says," Ronney demanded, smiling like a carved Christ. "You would like to crucify me too, wouldn't you, child? You'd love that, wouldn't you, Virginia May?"

"Oh, cheese it, you fricken teaser," the girl yelled, tearing off her bonnet and stamping on it.

"You're a drip. You're a wet smack, Ronney," George said now, taking his cue from the little girl. But he said it slowly, even with a sort of commiserating kindliness.

The little girl lowered herself on the wet grass and started watching, her eyes elliptical.

Now it was almost happening, Emily reminded herself concretely. Then it was happening: George in blue silk boxer's shorts, his tan skin rippling, his muscles bulging, his head butting, his leather gloves slapping. Ronney was nailed to the cross, hanging there limp and sorrowful, his small loins dripping blood. In a little while he'd become petrous, to be worshiped forever. Faith wouldn't like that. Faith, who was still asking stubbornly: Can Emily really carry this off like a lady? Can one be a lady and carry a pail of water and sponge, to be George's trainer? Not Ronney's; Christ had no trainer. "Can't you help him, darling?" she asked the little girl, pointing at Ronney. "I'm really a little concerned over the other one. He is so vulnerable, he is such a male."

The little girl shrugged.

Faith was listening so intently now. George shouldn't pound and slap so hard, Ronney shouldn't reverberate so much. But Emily in pearl-gray evening gown, backless, with lovely grooved back, down which George might any moment slide his tempting thumb, Emily was carrying a towel, a pail, and a sponge. Suddenly Emily threw in the towel. "Not here," she said sternly. "Not here, where she hasn't got any choice but to listen. Better finish it in the back yard."

The little girl jumped up with alacrity, but Ronney beat her to the back yard, with resigned body, obviously expecting George to follow him to demolish him further. "This is fun," the little girl said, putting her hot hand into Emily's.

In the back yard there was no open window, no heavy smell of flowers.

Disinterestedly now, she watched George flex his muscles. Ronney waited with hands folded. "Atta, atta," the little girl screamed. Then Ronney looked puzzled at the wall without windows, and George followed him with his glance. Certainly, Emily thought, now even George must admit that Faith had been listening all the time.

Then she heard a car stop, a wicket creak, and footsteps coming down the path. "Oh, guests are arriving," she said delightedly, smiling a hostess smile.

Desperately the little girl started flagging George's coat like a towel, but Ronney, walking past her, patted her head and said: "Perhaps you've been drinking a little, my dear, and you so young." A moment later they heard him say to the visitor: "But a cat, a cat will stick to its mate for life."

"That's where we came in," George said pensively.

But Emily stood there, trying to push all her thinking back into its old familiar, tight corner. Frantically, too, she started erecting a monument to the future—the length of Faith's grave away—and making resolutions. "Why don't you fill that grave you dug?" she asked the little girl. "And I will take charge of George. I'll make him over, so he'll be just like new again."

"I will," the girl said, and hurried away.

"How do we get out of this back yard?" George asked. "With all those new visitors now on that screened porch, all looking us over. But I want to get out of here."

"This way," Emily said, leading him through an unmarked door, along a white plastered passage, up three steps, down seven, past the smells of the lilies and the coffin with its pink face, even out of the front door and across the porch, where Ronney sat talking to two men in black and a woman with one stiff feather on her hat. "But we *did* have a lovely time, Ronney," Emily murmured in passing.

When she and George walked arm in arm down the path they noticed that the little girl had already filled the grave. Ants crawled over it. The path was steaming in the sun. In the background a window was open and from it the same curtain flagged again. They paused beneath the empty horizontal flagpole, and looking up at it, Emily said briskly, "George, I'm pretty sure we haven't forgotten anything."

# PAULO

by

George H. Taylor

When he was all alone, he called himself Paulo. He had private names for all the things which made up his narrow world. He had names for certain rocks and trees, for flowers which he loved, for sea gulls, ducks, and crows, for the salt marsh bordering the river's arm which the sea pushed in among the gently sloping hills. All these were his friends, and he would call to them, using the names he had made, as he walked alone through the fields, laughing sometimes and talking to these friends and to himself, always using his own words, his own secret language.

"I, Paulo," he said aloud. And he threw back his head, gazing up into the soft blue of the cloudless sky, searching the emptiness, straining and staring, as if he saw something strange and important beyond the pale, arching layers of space. "I, Paulo," he said again in a softer voice. Then he made a shrill cawing sound like that of a crow, an almost perfect imitation.

He walked on through the tall grass, smiling to himself, looking about him at his world, seeing the sea gulls circling over the river, hearing the answering caw of the crows in the dark forest beyond the hill. The crows called to him from the dark forest where he dared not go, and he turned and listened, wishing they would come to him in the fields, in the sunlight where he was safe and unafraid. He feared the dark forest, the silent forest, where he felt lost and alone; in it lurked threatening mysteries, shadows, and faint, sad voices whispering things he could never quite hear. He kept to the fields where he could see the sky, where he could see his friends, where he knew that he was safe. For a time he stood,

listening to the crows, waiting for them, but they did not come. He walked slowly on.

As he neared the edge of the salt marsh, he heard a voice calling, "Paul! Paul!" It was his mother. He stopped, cocking his head to one side, smiling, chuckling to himself. The echo of his mother's voice came back to him from the hill across the river's arm. "Paul. Paul." He nodded his head vigorously and whispered, "I, Paulo." And nodded again, still smiling. Then he started walking toward the house.

His mother was standing in the kitchen door, watching him come slowly across the meadow. He saw her there; he could see the little yellow and blue flowers on her apron. She was very pretty. Quickly he stooped over in the tall grass and began to fill his fist with daisies and the slender tendrils of wild vetch which grew all around him.

"Come on, Paul," his mother said. "Lunch is ready."

He ran toward her, and in his hurry he dropped some of the flowers he had picked. He held his fist out before him as he ran, clutching the few drooping stems which remained.

"Flowers," he said, holding them out to his mother. "Flowers!"

"That's very nice," his mother said, taking his gift carefully. "Lunch is on the table. Don't keep your father waiting."

"Flowers," Paul said. "Flowers." His face was round and fat and soft and smiling.

"Yes," his mother said. "They're very nice. Now run along and get your lunch." She pushed him gently before her through the door, noticing his size, how big he had become. He was taller than she was, taller and heavier, and only fifteen years old. As he moved ahead of her into the house, she hesitated for a moment, and then, reaching swiftly out the door, she dropped the moist little bundle of flowers into the trash can by the back steps.

His father was already seated at the kitchen table, and Paul could smell the hot beef stew which his father was ladling onto his plate. It smelled sweet and peppery and made him hungry.

"Sit down, Paul," his father said. His father looked at him, and his father's eyes were dark tunnels stretching far away, two dark tunnels with little candles of light flickering far away. Paul stood by the edge of the table, staring into his father's eyes.

"Sit down, Paul," his father said. "Your lunch is getting cold."

Paul sat down. "I know something," he said. He was looking out of the window away from his father. "I know something," he repeated. "I

know something, I know something. . . ." He kept saying it over and over in a singsong voice.

His mother brought the coffeepot to the table. "Yes, Paul," she said quietly. "That's nice." She took the big spoon and began to put stew on her son's plate. "This is good stew. You'll like it." She sat down beside him. "Here you are. Now open your mouth," she said. She had filled a smaller spoon with stew from his plate. Obediently he opened his mouth, and his mother put in the spoon with the sweet, peppery stew in it. "Chew it carefully," his mother said.

His father was looking at him again, but Paul kept his face turned toward the window, making it difficult for his mother to reach his mouth with the spoon. Some of the stew had spilled on his chin, and he could feel the warm, sticky pattern it made as it trickled across his skin. Then his mother took a napkin and wiped it away. Quietly she continued feeding him.

When lunch was finished, his mother began to carry the dirty dishes from the table to the sink. His father got up from the table and walked slowly from the room. Paul stayed in his chair, his face turned toward the window, his eyes looking out across the meadow at the apple trees that grew along the bank above the salt marsh. While he watched, a crow came out of the sky and landed on a branch of one of the trees, and in a moment two more joined it. Paul could hear them chuckling and cawing to each other as they hopped from branch to branch. His friends had come at last from the dark forest; they had finally answered his call and come to see him.

Paul pushed back his chair and got to his feet. "Do you want to go out again, Paul?" his mother asked. He nodded his head, smiling and pointing out the window. "All right," she said. "But don't go away. Stay close to the house now, won't you, Paul?" She reached out her hand and patted his shoulder gently, as if he were something fragile. "Stay close to the house, Paul. Do you understand?" she repeated.

"Stay close to the house, Paul," he said, smiling and nodding his head. He went out the back door and down the four wooden steps, stepping eagerly into the soft, fragrant grass. When he reached the corner of the house, he stopped a moment and looked to see where the crows had gone. He heard his father's voice inside the house.

"Has he gone out again?"

"Yes," his mother's voice answered. "I told him to stay close to the house."

Paul heard his father sigh. "I wish he could learn to do some things for himself. I wish he could dress himself and feed himself and wash himself. That doesn't seem like much to ask for."

"I know," his mother's voice said softly. "We don't ask very much for him. It isn't much to ask that your son be whole and normal like other sons." His mother's voice faded away, and Paul turned toward the orchard where he had seen the crows. The tall grass was warm about his legs, and it smelled fresh and clean and sweet, the way his mother did.

When he reached the apple trees, he found that the crows had flown away. He called to them, but the echo of his own voice was the only answer. The echo pleased him and made him laugh aloud; he repeated his call and listened to the echo's faint reply, smiling and nodding with delight. But finally he tired of this and walked on through the orchard to the edge of the bank which ran along the edge of the salt marsh. He sat down there on a big stone, watching the tide run in and looking at two ducks swimming close to the farther shore of the inlet. Ducks were nearly as interesting friends as crows and gulls. All big birds were good friends; they were easier to get close to than the timid little birds, and they had more sense too. They had real voices, and he could talk to them.

Paul watched the ducks swimming and diving near the opposite bank, and his eyes wandered up and away toward a small white house which stood on the hillside. He knew this house. He stared at it for a long time. He knew this house. He knew the girl who lived there. He liked to watch her. She was one of his friends. He stared at the distant white shape for a long time, but the house was too far away for him to be able to see the girl.

"I, Paulo!" he whispered to himself, striking his knee sharply with the flat of his hand. Quickly he got to his feet and began to walk along the bank of the inlet, climbing over the big rocks, wading through the stiff marsh grass, keeping close to the rising water. He kept turning his head and looking across at the white house on the hill. It did not look very far away. If only he could walk in a straight line toward it, he could get there in no time. But the inlet separated him from the other shore, from the hill and the white house and the girl. He had to walk all the way to the head of the inlet and then back again on the other side before he could reach the house; it was a long way and it would take a long time. If he could only walk on the water. . . . But he was afraid of the water, afraid of its soft strength and the sinister way it had of creeping up the

shore behind you when you had forgotten that it was there, stretching its soft, cold fingers toward your unwary feet. There was only one way to reach the white house, and that was the long way. Paul walked on through the marsh grass, singing a song to himself that had no words.

When he reached the head of the inlet, Paul came upon a little beach, half mud, half sand, and he stopped there awhile to play with the pretty colored stones he found near the water's edge. There were smooth, flat stones too, fine for skipping, and he amused himself for some time throwing them far across the water, watching them skim the surface, hit, then fly high into the air to repeat the performance farther on. At last his arm became tired, and he continued on toward the white house.

As he approached the house, Paul's manner became cautious, almost furtive. He moved slowly through the stunted trees and thick underbrush, bending low, stopping to listen from time to time, his smooth, round face smiling secretly. He crawled the last few yards, careful to make no noise. Weeds and bushes were thickly interlaced above him, giving him good cover, and before his face was the rough, brown surface of a rotting log, the log which had hidden him well on all his previous visits.

Slowly he raised his head above the top of the log and looked toward the white house. He was behind the house, perhaps twenty yards from the back steps, and there were only a few thin bushes and a narrow strip of brown lawn between himself and the girl. She was sitting on the steps beside a bright aluminum kettle, and she had on an apron, a pretty apron like the one his mother wore, decorated with little yellow and blue flowers. Her apron was spread out across her lap, and in it she held a green mound of pea pods freshly picked from her garden. She was humming a beautiful tune as she carefully split each pod and emptied the hard little pellets into the kettle beside her.

Paul watched, fascinated. She was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. He wanted to jump up from behind his log and run to her so that he could join her in the song she hummed. He wanted to dip his hands into her kettle and let the hard little peas run coolly through his fingers, feeling their roundness and hardness and smoothness. He wanted to touch her marvelous hair; he wanted to feel how soft it was, how smooth and silken. He wanted to touch her arms and legs, her hands, and her soft, beautiful face. He wanted to sit close beside her and listen to her voice, listening to her gentle melodies, watching how she shaped her lips to make the words come forth. He wanted to breathe

deeply of her smell, the fresh, clean smell of the golden meadows and the green marsh grass. He wanted to do all these things and perhaps other things too. But he stayed behind his log, breathless and afraid, faced by something which was beyond his understanding. He could only look at her and worship from afar.

The girl's mother called to her from somewhere inside the house, and the girl turned to answer. "Yes, Mother. I'm almost finished." When she moved, her hair seemed to turn into live, dancing fire about her head, red, golden fire from the reflected sun.

Paul sighed quietly and moved behind his log. She was the most wonderful thing in the world. If only he could take her some flowers, a whole field of flowers, and lay them at her feet! It was the only way he knew to express his love.

The girl was looking around the yard, her eyes straying casually from object to object. Suddenly she was looking directly at his log, directly at him. Paul looked into her eyes, and her eyes looked into his. For a moment neither of them moved. Then the girl looked away. Her hands picked up a pod from her lap, and Paul heard the dry rattle of the peas as they rolled into the bright kettle beside her. The air drained slowly from his lungs, and the sudden pain, which had filled his chest when her eyes looked into his, left him, floating out on the waves of his exhaled breath. She had not seen him, after all.

She continued shelling her peas, and Paul scarcely noticed when she turned her head slightly and called, "Mother?" Her mother's voice answered beyond the kitchen door. "Is Father there?" the girl asked softly, as if she did not care. Paul could not hear her mother's reply, but he heard the girl say, "Yes!" with distinct emphasis.

In a moment the girl's father came out the back door. He talked to his daughter in low tones, and Paul could hear only the murmur of their voices. Neither of them looked toward where he lay hidden, so Paul was not alarmed. But the ground was beginning to feel hard, and he considered crawling quietly away. He almost started to, but he wanted to keep looking at the girl as long as he could; as long as she stayed there on the steps, he could not make himself leave. In fact, he was so intent on staring at her, memorizing each detail, each motion, each change of expression, that he failed to notice when her father left her, or where he went.

The girl still sat on the steps, though she had finished shelling her

peas. She just sat there, staring at the ground, no longer humming to herself, no longer doing anything. It was as if she were waiting for something, at the same time concentrating very hard on not waiting, trying to sit relaxed, but unable to keep the expectant tenseness from her muscles. She continued to look at the ground, a small patch of rusty grass just beyond her feet, and she stared at it the way a person does when they would much rather be looking somewhere else. Nevertheless, she did not look in Paul's direction.

Then Paul heard the sharp, dry snap of a twig behind him. Without turning his head, he knew that there was someone standing near him. He could feel their presence through his skin; a thousand little shocks traveled down his nerves, sending him urgent warnings. But it was too late. A strong hand seized his collar from behind, dragging his head back painfully, half lifting him to his knees. Another hand took hold of his belt in back, tugging him backwards, scraping his toes through the dry leaves, plowing two small furrows across the ground. And then as suddenly his backward motion changed, and Paul found himself thrown violently forward over the log that had served him as a hiding place. The rough bark scraped at his clothes, and the hard curve of the log drove the wind out of him as his body was jammed against it.

"Now, boy, I'm going to teach you a lesson I don't think you'll forget." It was a man's voice, her father's voice, and his words came in short, uneven bursts mingled with the hissing of his labored breath. He held Paul over the log, still gripping Paul's collar, almost choking him, though Paul had made no move to escape, had said no word. The man had released his hold on the belt, and now he reached around Paul's waist and began to unbuckle the belt awkwardly, using only his one hand.

"I'll teach you a lesson," the man said, breathing hard through his open mouth.

Paul lay still across the log. His arms lay slack and useless about his head, and his face rested in the cool, dry leaves. He felt the man pulling at his belt, and he felt his belt sliding, sliding around his waist, until suddenly it was gone. He heard footsteps, light and quick, and the girl was standing there near him.

"Now keep away from him," the man said. "You'd better go in the house." But the girl did not go away. Paul could feel her standing near him; above the dusty smell of the dead leaves he could smell her. And

she smelled clean and fresh, the way he knew she would, of meadows and marsh grass, clean and fresh, the way his mother smelled. He was glad that she was there.

"You'd better go in the house," the man repeated. But the girl remained silent. She stayed there near him.

"All right," the man said. "I'm going to teach him a lesson."

Paul heard the sound—a vicious whish, ending in a flash of pain. Paul jerked his head up from its pillow of dry leaves. He had never felt pain like that before. His fat, round face was a clownish mask of startled wonder. The man wrenched his collar tighter, choking him, cutting his sudden gasp of pain short, leaving him terrified. Again Paul heard the sound and felt the burning pain, and again and again.

"I'll teach you to stay away from my daughter, you overgrown moron. I'll teach you to stay away from this house." The man's hoarse breathing blurred his words.

With the repeated pain, Paul's surprise passed and was replaced by wild fear. Catlike he gathered his legs and arms beneath him, and before the man could strike him again, he lunged frantically over the log, dragging the man after him. For a moment the man clung to Paul's collar, but then suddenly he lost his hold and fell heavily over the log on which Paul had lain. His mouth gaping open in a soundless cry, Paul stumbled across the yard, nearly running into the house in his blind terror. At the last moment he turned to run around it, and as he turned he tripped, sprawling headlong on the grass.

"He's losing his pants!" the girl said. "He's losing his pants!"

Paul stumbled to his feet, tugging up his trousers, trying to run at the same time. "Hey, wait a minute," the man said. "Wait a minute." But Paul did not hear him. He could not hear anything except the terrible noise inside his head. He rushed on down the hill, blundering into trees, tripping over bushes, and all the while trying to hold up his slipping trousers.

Paul ran blindly on. When he came to the inlet, the tide was high, and Paul splashed through the edge of the water, unaware of the cold and the dampness, unaware how close he was to the water he feared. He was gasping for breath, choking, coughing, feeling pain as a hard lump in his chest. But still he struggled on, trying to run. The stones bruised his feet and legs, and the tall marsh grass slashed at him as he went by, a forest of thin, keen rapiers, cutting long, shallow slits in his insensitive skin. But Paul kept going, running, stumbling, fighting his way.

"Where have you been, Paul?" His mother was standing by the apple tree, watching his lumbering progress across the field. "Where have you been? I've been looking all over for you." And then he was before her, falling at her feet, throwing his arms around her legs, burying his face between her shoes.

"Paul!" she said. "What's the matter with you, Paul?" She sat on the ground and tried to raise his head. As she touched him, he seemed to quiver in every nerve and muscle. "Why, Paul, you're covered with dirt. And you've hurt yourself. What has happened to you? Can't you tell me?"

But Paul could not tell her. His breath rose and fell, sobbing in his throat, and he knew no words for how he felt. He was glad to be home, to be safe, to have escaped from the pain and the terror, but he knew no words with which to tell her. He held tightly to her as she sat beside him, and he buried his head in her skirt, smelling her sweet, clean smell and feeling gradually happy again.

"My poor boy," she said. "My poor baby." She held him close, stroking his head gently with one hand.

For a long time they sat there listening to the soft lapping of the water against the bank, hearing the creak and murmur of the branches in the old apple tree above them, stirred by the faint, warm breeze from the south. Finally his mother looked up; the sun was sliding down behind the tall trees of the dark forest, and shadows began to push long arms across the golden meadow grass. Slowly she released her son and got to her feet.

"Come on, Paul," she said. "We have to go home now. I've got to get you cleaned up before supper."

Paul scrambled up, rubbing his eyes. He had been dozing peacefully in his mother's arms. As he stood up, his trousers began to slip down over his hips. For a moment he had forgotten that he had no belt.

"Why, Paul," his mother said, "you've lost your belt."

Quickly he grabbed the waistband of his trousers with both hands, and, grinning and chuckling, he began to frisk about his mother, repeating in his parrot's voice, "Paulo's lost his belt! Paulo's lost his belt!" Silently his mother took his arm and led him across the field to the house.

That evening the girl's father came to see them. Paul, when he saw him, ran up to his room and hid himself under his bed. But even there he could hear the voices below in the living room. The girl's father did not stay long, and at first he talked quietly, almost apologetically, explain-

ing, excusing, suggesting. But Paul's father, when he spoke, was neither quiet nor apologetic.

"Mr. Franks, you had no right to beat my son. You know who he is, you know what he's like, you know he never hurts anyone, and you know that beating him was an act of stupid and unnecessary cruelty."

After that the girl's father was not quiet nor apologetic either. "Yes, I know your son, I know what he's like. Everybody around here knows what he's like. And I don't think that anybody but you is so sure that he's harmless. Maybe he's never hurt anybody yet—but there's always a first time."

"But Paul would never hurt anyone or anything," Paul's mother said.

"That's what you think, because you're his mother," the man said. "But you aren't sure that he won't start, any more than I'm sure. I came here to tell you to keep that boy home, keep him from running wild all over the countryside, bothering people and scaring them. If you don't, well, I'll have to complain about you, that's all. The state has places where he can be looked after and where he won't bother people, and that's where he belongs. You see that he stays close to home, or that's where he goes. And I mean what I say."

The girl's father left the house. Paul heard him start his car and drive rapidly away.

"But we can't make a prisoner of him," Paul's mother said. "He's not a prisoner."

"I'm afraid he is," Paul's father said, so softly that Paul could scarcely hear his words.

For several days Paul stayed indoors, unable to see his friends, the crows, the ducks, and the sea gulls, except by watching for them from the window, unable to pick flowers or to smell them, unless his mother brought some into the house to put in bowls or vases. Sometimes, after he had been looking at the pictures in a magazine, he could fall asleep stretched out on the floor, and that helped to make the day go by. But most of the time he roamed restlessly from room to room, stopping to look out each window that he passed, getting in his mother's way when she was cleaning, or disturbing his father if he happened to be in the house. He tried to talk to himself as he had in the fields or when he sat on the bank above the salt marsh; he tried to sing some of his private songs which had no words. But the words would not come to him, and the songs stuck in his throat. The world was flat and dull, with no pleasure in it.

At last the day came when his mother said he could go out into the fields again. "But, Paul, you *must* stay close to the house," she said. "If you don't, you'll never be allowed to go out to play again."

But he had been in too much of a hurry to get out into the sun, to get the open sky over his head again. He listened to her words, smiling and nodding, but as soon as the words stopped he was out of the house, running and laughing through the tall, sweet grass. That day, however, Paul did not go far. His mother's words remained a faint echo in his mind, and he played his games in his own field and in the orchard near the edge of the salt marsh.

Each day his mother repeated her warning, just before she let him out the kitchen door, and each day Paul's smiling nod became more and more mechanical, until all meaning had left the echoing words.

One day he sat on the bank above the salt marsh and looked across the inlet at the hill beyond. He saw the white house there, not far away, but too far for him to see the girl he knew, the girl who was his friend, so beautiful, so soft and gentle. He looked at the house for a long time. He should not go there, he knew. There were reasons, there were memories, and he knew that he would have to be careful. He would have to hide and be very, very quiet, so that no one would know that he was there, not even the girl. He continued to sit on the bank, swinging his legs and looking across at the white house.

Finally with a sigh Paul looked down at the water of the inlet. But there was no water, except for a thin, shallow trickle in the very center; instead there were smooth, sloping banks of mud, a wide gray trough, almost dry. The tide was out, and the inlet was no longer a wide water barrier separating him from the further bank. He could walk straight over with no trouble at all; there was no need to take the long, slow walk around the head of the inlet; there was no need to struggle over steep ledges and through tangled marsh grass. He could reach the white house as quickly as he could turn around and walk back to his own home.

Without waiting any longer, Paul stood up and began walking down through the bordering marsh grass, down to the wrinkled, gray mud. The mud was softer than he had expected, and his shoes were soon coated with it. He began to take big steps so that he would only have to put his feet down in the soft ooze a minimum number of times, but the mud became softer and more treacherous, rising above his shoe tops and sucking him down deeper with each stride. Walking became hard work; he had to fight each time to free his foot for the next step, and each time

he sank a little deeper. He had almost reached the little trickle of water which marked the halfway point, when he almost fell. He had tried to lift his left leg to take another forward stride, but the leg had not pulled loose. It was as if strong hands gripped him by the ankles, ready to pull him down. He stepped back with his right leg, trying to get a firmer purchase so as to free himself, but the mud had crept up halfway to his knee. Driving down fiercely with his right leg, trying manfully to break loose from the mud's cold grip, he found that his right leg was now stuck even deeper than his left. Wordlessly, with only an occasional grunt or moan, he fought the drag of the mud, churning, thrashing, always sinking deeper and deeper. It was no use. He was caught.

For a moment Paul ceased struggling; there was no sound except the harsh whistling of his breath and the soft, secret whispering of the mud. But even though he was no longer fighting or trying to move at all, the mud continued to suck him down. He could feel it sliding up around his thighs, clinging to him, slyly easing him down, wrapping him in its gray folds, cold and deadly. In horror he began to plunge and struggle more wildly than ever, still uttering no word, silent except for the grunting efforts of his breathing. But his new efforts only drove him deeper until the mud was nearly up to his waist.

He looked up at the shore toward the little white house which now seemed so close. There was no one in sight. He looked back at his own shore, and he found that he was alone, trapped, with no help anywhere. He rested quietly, and as long as he did not move he sank very, very slowly. For a long time he rested, waiting, and no one came. He did not cry out; he made no call for help. He stood there, motionless, silent. And the mud grew tight around his waist.

After a long time he noticed that the water was beginning to get a little deeper. The thin trickle which ran through the mud just beyond him was fanning out, forming puddles and rapidly spreading tributaries. While he watched, the water pushed out its squirming tentacles in all directions, and each separate trickle moved faster and faster, joining with one another, becoming wider and deeper. The mud around him became softer and colder and wetter. The tide was starting to rise; the water was reaching for him with slow, sly fingers, the water which was more terrible to him than the mud could ever be, the water which he had always feared. He wanted to scream, to fight, to tear himself loose by one last gigantic effort from the mud which held him, but he remained motionless, silent. The water grew deeper around him.

Then Paul looked toward the shore from which he had come, as if to look for one last time at his fields, his apple trees, his home. His father was standing on the bank. He was standing calmly, a quiet shadow against the bright yellow of the meadow, looking out across the mud at his son, who was about to die. He might have been there a long time.

Paul and his father looked at each other, straight into each other's eyes, and neither said a word. There were no words for this; there was just the fact that his son was caught and about to die. For some minutes they stared at each other, Paul half twisted around, his round, fat face tilted up at a ludicrous angle. He sank slowly into the mud and rising water. The whole world was silent.

Suddenly Paul saw his mother, saw her running through the tall grass, running to his father's side, and then running past him.

"Wait, Louise! You can't save him," his father called. "He's caught in the mud." But his mother ran on through the marsh grass, on through the soft, gray ooze. She weighed less than her son, and it did not take her long to reach him; the mud closed around her running feet, but she could not be stopped until she was with her son.

Paul saw his father capering on the bank and heard his shouted words. "Louise! Get back while you can. The mud will get you too. Get back while you can. The tide is running in."

But his mother clung to Paul, gripping him beneath the arms, trying to lift him, trying with all the strength of her slight body to drag her son free. At first she had appeared taller than Paul, taller because she still stood on the surface of the mud, but soon their heads were nearly level. Instead of freeing her son, she had merely pulled herself into the mud with him. Slowly the rising water advanced upon them.

Paul looked past his mother's shoulder toward the shore. His father, he saw, was gone. Paul was glad. Alone with his mother he felt almost happy again. She held him close, warming and comforting him with her body. Paul did not even notice the rising water, not until it began to lap beneath his arms, sending particles of icy spray into his mouth and eyes. When that happened, he wanted to scream, to fight, but his mother soothed him with quiet words, clinging to him, making him feel safe even in the midst of the terrible water.

The boat's motor was not loud, and Paul did not hear it until its white-planked side was nearly brushing his head. He looked up and saw his father in the boat, his father, with a coil of heavy rope in his hands, his father, with wild, dark eyes. For a moment terror came back to him, and

he began to churn the water with his outstretched arms. Even as he splashed and fought, his mother seemed to slide away from him, slowly at first, and then suddenly. He saw her wet, muddy legs suddenly kicking in the air, and then they were gone inside the boat. For the first time Paul cried out, and the loud echo of his cry came back to him unheard.

In another moment he felt himself wrenched upward. He continued to struggle and cry out. But there was a rope around him and hands pulling at him. Gradually, painfully, he felt the mud leaving him, sliding away down his body, down his legs, until surprisingly he was free. The hard side of the boat hurt his chest as they pulled him in, struggling with the weight of his heavy body; and then the struggling was over, the pain was over. Paul lay full length on the floorboards of the boat, feeling the deep throb of the engine beside him.

After a little Paul sat up. His mother was there, close to him, and his father was wrapping a big, dirty canvas around them, trying to keep them warm.

"It's a good thing I thought of the boat," his father was saying. "The tide came in just enough so that I could get to you. It was the only way."

Paul looked around him. The afternoon was warm and sunny, and the water through which the boat moved so peacefully reflected the deep blue of the sky. Over on the shore he saw a crow sitting on the branch of a tree, watching him. It was one of his friends who had come down from the forest to see him, to see if he was all right. Without warning Paul threw back his head and cawed raucously, startling his father and mother.

"Paul," his mother said. "That's enough. He heard you."

Paul waved to the crow, smiling and nodding, chuckling to himself. The boat moved smoothly on toward the landing, Paul's father standing at the wheel, and soon they were alongside the float and safely tied up. His father bent over him to help him, and Paul looked at him for the first time since he had seen his father standing on the bank above the mud flats. Their eyes met, and Paul saw that something had changed; his father's eyes were different. They were filled with little, dancing lights, almost like his mother's. They were no longer two dark, fearful tunnels into which he dared not look.

"I was wrong," his father said, his voice soft and far away. "I was wrong, Paul. You *are* happy, aren't you?"

Paul laughed aloud, his round, fat face shining in the sun.

# THE PILGRIM HEART

by

Prudencio de Pereda

Al heard a pig slopping water, from far away. Then, there were many of them very near—rumbling and slopping, and fighting and crying—and he awoke and heard them just outside the pup tent. Fox had left his washing water in his helmet again, and a bunch of them were outside fighting for it. Al nudged him sharply. "Fox! Fox, you bastard!" Fox moaned. "Fox, the pigs are at your sloppy water again. Get out and chase them!"

Fox moaned again. "Aaaah, Al! Al, don't bother me," he mumbled. "I'm tired. Let me sleep, Al."

"I'll let you sleep, you little bastard! I told you not to leave that water around. . . . How d'you expect *me* to sleep?"

Fox began to shake with sleepy laughter, but he did not get up. Al gave his ass a good boot and then got out of the tent. He made sure to pull the blankets off Fox as he went out.

Outside, three pigs were scrambling around Fox's steel helmet, grunting and fighting to get at the soapy water. More of them were up fighting around the mess tent. This was Al's first bivouac in the Louisiana maneuver area, and he still wasn't used to the damned things. He booted the three pigs away from the helmet and threw the water after them.

Someone near by laughed softly, and Al thought it was Fox. When he turned around, the man in the tent next to his was watching him through the opened back of his tent. "Good hunting, feller," he said quietly.

"Thanks!" Al said. "Thanks." He went over to the tent. "They don't bother you?"

"I don't sleep, anyway."

Al could make his face out in the moonlight, but he did not know him. "You just come down?" the man said. He seemed to have the same idea about Al.

"From ASTP! I'm one of the college boys," Al said. They'd been rushed into combat outfits from the Army specialist schools only four days ago. All of them were still groggy. "I don't see how you do it," Al said, then. Just looking at the open tent made him feel cold. "Are you used to this damned outdoor stuff?"

"I don't mind it. I like to look out."

"And dream?" Al said.

"No, just think! About something real. Very real."

"Well, don't ground it out," Al said. He was beginning to shiver and wanted to get back to his tent before the other man noticed this. "You may wear it down. . . . I'll see you tomorrow," he said, and started back.

"You might," the other man said. He grinned at Al in the same soft way as the laugh. When he said, "Good night!" he did not make the usual crack about the college boys. Al saw him turning on his back as he crawled into his tent.

Al jostled Fox as he pulled the blankets back over himself—and booted him again, more softly this time. Fox moaned, and then began to laugh. "You bastard!" Al hissed at him.

Their sleepless neighbor was a man named Stephenson. Al found this out the next day. Stephenson had been in the outfit for two years, but was still a private first class. In an armored division, that meant that he did just what he was told, in the way he was told. He didn't exert himself, didn't brown-nose, and didn't get into trouble.

The man Al had asked about Stephenson said he was a "funny" guy. "He's not a 'queer' or anything like that. Just a quiet guy," the man said. "That's queer enough around here," he said, laughing. Al agreed with him. The men in this outfit really loved to talk.

Al learned that Stephenson had a permanent hold on the job of fireguard. Whenever there was any firing on the range—and there was firing every day in these times—he took his post at the civilian road connection and kept all cars and persons out of the firing lines. The way Al heard it, it seemed like an ideal job. There were no ordinary details for the fireguards—no KP, no vehicle checking, and no policing up the dirty, dusty roads of Louisiana.

"Maybe you could talk to him about getting us on," Fox suggested. "It sounds wonderful."

"I should talk to him about getting *us* on! I don't even know the guy," Al said.

"Aaah, Al—you don't know the guy!" Fox said in that way he had of always saying, "Why don't you ever want to do anything to help us?" Fox was younger and a little more sensitive than most of the other ex-specialists, but he had a very practical viewpoint about trying to give Al and himself a boost. "You don't know the guy?" he almost whined.

There was a movie in the bivouac area that night. It was a slow, drawn-out movie that couldn't hold anyone, particularly after the light rain started. Al stuck it out, though—he was desperate after days of KP and policing. He stuck it out to the end.

When he got back to the tent, Fox was sleeping soundly. Al turned Fox's helmet out and then threw it into the grass. He sat down under the tree to smoke a last cigarette and watched the light rain and the long, neat row of brown-black tents. He hoped that Stephenson would come along, but the tent next to theirs stayed quiet and untouched. Aaaah, what the hell am I looking for? Al thought, and went in to sleep.

He was falling back into that old dream of the barracks in Kentucky when someone started to walk at the side of the tent and then went around and stood at the front. "Figueira?" he heard Stephenson's voice say very low. "Figueira?"

Al sat up and then moved out to the front. He was very careful not to disturb Fox. He saw Stephenson standing a little to the front of the tent. "Hyah, Stephenson," he said.

"I didn't mean to wake you," Stephenson said. He knelt down.

"That's all right. . . . I just came in."

"Would you like to go on fireguard?"

"Fireguard?—I sure would! I sure would, Stephenson!" Al began to feel suddenly awake and alive.

"I have to have another man with me tomorrow night. It'll mean three days free."

"Thanks. Thanks very much! . . . That's swell. . . . Say, how did you find my name?" Al asked suddenly. He wanted to touch this man.

"I was looking at the AST records. I saw yours. . . . I liked it."

"You mean about the writing, and about Spain?"

"Yes—and some of the other stuff. I . . . I thought you were the kind of a guy I'd like to talk to."

"Swell," Al said. "Swell!" He knew that he was blushing and that he would be saying too much soon, but he felt wonderful, now. "I like to talk, too," he said. He grinned. "I'd like to talk to anyone who got me fireguard, but I think I'd like it talking to you."

"I'll talk to Borrman in the morning, and you'll go on tomorrow night."

"Swell. . . . Thanks again!"

When Al told Fox the good news, he was sore—sore and depressed. "You can't talk to him, heh?" Fox said.

"He came to me, Fox," Al said. "He found out my name. . . . I didn't ask him."

"O.K. O.K.! . . . You just think of me on the garbage detail while you're basking out there."

"You and your florid phrases!"

As a matter of fact, though, when Al got out there, he found that you actually could bask. Stephenson had his pup tent set up off the road in the shadow and protection of some trees. You could still see the three forking roads clearly and far away, but the tent was well clear of the mud and dust. It would be cool in the day, and now it was quiet and protected in the night.

There were no houses or shacks in sight, in any direction, and Al had passed no trucks or cars on the road. "Do they really need a guard here?" he asked Stephenson.

"Some jerk—or some Joe of ours—wanders around here every once in a while. We have to turn them back," Stephenson said. He nodded toward the front road that whipped straight into a night-black valley. "That's the road to the Infiltration Course and the ranges."

"But what about the flags? Don't they put them up?"

"They fall down or they blow away. We have to be very careful." Stephenson smiled when Al made a face at the "we." "We've got a real job here, Figueira," Stephenson said, and grinned.

"I know. I know."

"Do you want to put your stuff over in the tent?"

Al walked over to the pup tent and undid his bundle. He spread the raincoat on the ground and then fixed the three blankets sleeping-bag fashion. He was holding the folded mosquito net in his hand when Stephenson said, "You can use that as a pillow. We don't need them here."

"Swell!" Al said. He crawled in and fixed it as a pillow. "Swell!"

When he came out and stood up, Al reached for his pack and offered Stephenson a cigarette. He felt shy and embarrassed before the fact of Stephenson's kindness, and, now that it had begun, he wondered if he could do his part of it. Al Figueira couldn't understand why a man should want to do something for him just because he would sit and listen. He had been listening to people all his life. He had felt it was their due. People didn't slam doors in his face—so he had never shut off his attention to others.

The one big thing that worried Al was the frankness of these men. Two years of endless maneuvers had given them a tense, almost hysterical honesty, and he felt afraid that Stephenson might want to tell him something so beyond his ken he couldn't understand or feel it.

Now, as he held the light for Stephenson's cigarette, he watched the good, sensitive face. He thought he liked this guy. Al figured he should give him all the breaks he could.

"You're an interesting bunch of men," he heard Stephenson saying.

"Oh, yes. Yes," Al said. "Lots of good men. Lots of talent. . . . Don't say it's wasted, though," he said. "We've been hearing that for two weeks now."

"Oh, no!" Stephenson puffed and smiled the soft smile. "We can use that kind of man here—think of something else than beer or the movies."

"Is that why you keep to yourself so much?" Al said. He didn't want to be tough. He wanted to start him off quickly.

"Oh, I'm not intellectual," Stephenson said. "I don't have much brains myself—but I guess a man does feel like talking about something real sometimes. . . . It isn't their fault," he went on suddenly and apologetically. "I haven't got the right to think what I say is interesting."

"Well, we do talk a lot," Al said. Stephenson was a kind, soft-smiling guy, and he truly wanted to help him. "We had six months' practice at the university. There were bull sessions every night—and every morning. You'll get plenty of talking, now, Stephenson."

"I guess I just want to talk a little—most of it about myself, too." Stephenson smiled apologetically. "Hell, Figueira!" he said. He looked down at the blankets and then sat down slowly. Al sat down on his blanket. "I'm doing this badly as hell," Stephenson said. "I just want to tell something—I guess that's what it is. . . . I hope you don't mind that I got you out here. I mean, this is a dirty trick to . . ."

"This is a good deal!" Al said quickly. His reassuring tone was honest

and sincerely felt. "But I'm a writer, you know. It's supposed to be dangerous to talk to writers." He grinned.

Stephenson grinned back—with more confidence now. "I think you're the kind of a guy I'd want to talk to. I can't say I've read any of your stuff, but I can see that."

"You've got the right place for it," Al said. "I really mean it—thanks again for bringing me out here!" How quiet it is, he thought. How comfortable and cool! It was like a break in the storm of the past two weeks. "This is a wonderful setup," he said. "It's really wonderful." I'll buy anything you want to tell me, he thought.

Stephenson told his story very quietly—as Al had expected he would—but he told it in such a way that Al could see all the relief and feeling coming with it. Al smoked four king-size cigarettes through the telling and gave Stephenson a word whenever Stephenson seemed to think he was talking too much and needed reassurance.

"There's something wrong with me," Stephenson started. "I can't approach women. . . . Oh, I'm not a queer or anything like that," he said. The look on Al's face had stopped him dead. "It's just that I can't be near them when I want so much to be. You know, Figueira, that there's a time between first looking at a girl or a woman and liking her, and then getting to talk to her naturally, walking with her, kissing her. I can't bridge that gap. I can't work that time. It stops me dead. I'm more afraid of it than anything else in the world."

Stephenson looked down at his cigarette. He seemed very glad to have gotten started. Al watched him and thought how much he must have thought, how much he must have worked this over before feeling he could tell it to anyone.

"Lots of guys are supposed to be bashful and shy," Stephenson said, "but they work through that period pretty easily. Some Joes are even bumpkins—they can't move, they can't talk, they can't do anything—but they meet up with a woman who takes them up and brings them along. I never met that kind of a woman," Stephenson said, "probably because I couldn't even get to the first point, and maybe because I didn't want to. . . . I felt a little bigger than that kind of thing. I didn't want to get taken home and cradled.

"I never went with whores," he said, looking very straight at Al. "That's probably the first advice I'd get from the Joes here. I just couldn't —I think you understand that.

"I don't know if you've ever been alone in a big city, Figueira. It's the worst kind of loneliness in the world. Being alone among people is hell—you've really got to build your skin of iron, then, for that. I used to walk through those big cities near the camps—or when I was on furlough—and I'd just watch the people and the buildings, until I got so tired and afraid of the people I was glad to come to a street that was lonely and empty and long. I liked the suburbs best. They were quiet. They had trees and there weren't many people around at nights.

"Once, in a night, I passed a house where a woman was combing her hair in a lighted room. There was a guy sitting on the bed and looking down at a paper or something. The woman was dressed and all that, but she had long full hair and was combing it out. I watched and hated the stupid, dumb jerk who could sit and look away from all that wonderful beauty! . . . She was talking to him, too—turning around and saying things to him as she combed her hair. I had to move away from that. I couldn't stand it. I used to think—how could I ever get to that point with a woman?

"I used to watch them in crowds . . . on the streets . . . in the stores, or in the movies. I got to know every one of their intimate gestures—all the ways they had of telling a guy they loved him, that they liked to sleep with him, that they liked to walk up to him for a kiss—all this without saying a word.

"When I was in a theater in Columbus, one night, I saw a girl hand her pocketbook to her escort to hold while she straightened her stocking. She had a beautiful leg, but I don't think that was the thing that really got me. It was the way she was so quietly intimate with him there in that public place. Without being cheap or shoddy, or anything like that, she showed him how much she was his. . . . His eyes were on her fingers all the time as she worked her hands on her thighs—and she seemed to think that that was all right, that that was where they belonged."

Stephenson stopped to look down at his cigarette. Al watched his face. There had been no cars or vehicles, yet, and no firing. Al thought how nice this quiet was. He had no trouble fixing his interest on Stephenson's story. A man had a problem.

"I used to build up defenses for myself," Stephenson said. "Whenever I had to listen to the Joes telling about their love life—that was nine tenths of the time—I'd think to myself that I wouldn't really be interested in their women. Even if I could approach them, I wouldn't be interested in that kind of women. They were stupid and brutal, I'd think.

I would want a superior type of woman. If I'd get through the hell I was going through, I'd have to aim for something like that. . . . But I don't want you to think I'm a prude or a damned fool, Figueira. I thought of doing their things with that superior kind of woman.

"Some of their ideas were damned good! When we were over at Campbell, I heard one of the better guys telling about having his girl in a bathtub full of water." Stephenson laughed. Al grinned at him. "It seemed like a wonderful idea. He made it very interesting. I saved *that* for my superior girl. I keep calling her 'superior,' " he said, "but I mean that she'd have to have so much patience, so much love, and so much understanding. . . . I saved some of the nights in the Cincinnati hotels, too, and the story about Packer's three hours in Buffalo on a stop-over."

Stephenson wiped his face with his hand and started to light a cigarette. Al thought he could smell the core of the story coming. He said, "That must have been tough."

"You're not . . . ?"

"No, I mean about living with the guys, with something like that hitting you inside."

"It was hell. It wasn't their fault, of course—but I certainly must have seemed queer to them. . . . They were pretty straight to me, though," he said. "You can beat down kidding pretty easily with a little sense. . . . But you know that," Stephenson said.

"I've learned," Al said.

"One of the worst guys turned out to be the best," Stephenson said. He looked down at his cigarette and then out to a small sound in the dark valley. Al turned and saw three tracers red-pencil the darkness. "Testing," Stephenson said. "That's the Infiltration." They watched for a moment, then, Stephenson was saying, as Al came back to him, "There was a man in our outfit—he's in Recon, now—named Schorr. He's a college man," Stephenson said, watching Al's attention, "—phi-bete and postgraduate, and he used to do personnel work before he came into the Army. Didn't want to be an officer, so he stuck with us.

"Schorr tagged himself on to me—or tagged me to him—because he liked to talk and because I had some education. . . . We went around a lot together during basic—that was the time of all work and no passes—and Schorr had to have someone to talk to. Then, when the kidding started, he seemed to think that he could do more of it than anybody because of our friendship.

"He was really good at it, too," Stephenson said. "Very good—and I went along with it. . . . I didn't think there was any meanness behind it, and Schorr always knew when to stop. He was trying to cure my adolescence, I think. . . . He was a very subtle performer.

"Another reason I think I didn't mind him was because I got to know Schorr pretty well through his kidding. I could see his intelligence didn't go very deep—he was pretty shallow for all that surface efficiency! That's why he always had to keep talking or moving. . . . I began to feel a little superior to him.

"He went on his first furlough before I did—I was at the bottom of the list, and he was at the top. . . . When he came back, I could see right away that something had gotten into him—something or somebody had broken into that control. But Schorr wouldn't talk. . . . That was very strange, too. He went around, keeping this terrific thing inside him—all inside. He talked about ordinary things, and he griped like hell and all that, but I could tell all along that he wasn't talking about the real thing. . . . Sometimes, I thought he'd split a gut when we'd be sitting together at chow, and no one else was around, but he wouldn't talk. Then he got fireguard, on his third day back, and he said, 'Come on, Stephie. Let's take a day off.' So, I went on to fireguard with him."

Stephenson smiled down at his cigarette, but did not look at Al. "We had plenty of time there"—he grinned at Al—"and along about the afternoon we were sitting down and Schorr said, 'Stephie, I think you're the one safe guy I can tell this to—and I'm glad you're my pal.' " Stephenson grinned again at this. "He was a little more like the old Schorr, now," he said, "he could really talk again. . . . I'd heard all about his particular girl friend when we'd been out on the assault course. Schorr had plenty of girls, but this one was the real one, the special one—the one he hadn't been able to get yet. Her name was Kelmscott, and she was as rare and wonderful as the name, Schorr said. . . . I felt she must have been something, because Schorr had good taste and intelligence, and he was very persuasive. You'll understand why this is so important later, Figueira," Stephenson said. He smiled down at the cigarette again, and then looked out toward the black valley. No tracers were alive there now. There had only been the first three.

"Well, anyway," Stephenson said, "I thought of this girl as something very smart and finished—just out of *Vogue,* or one of those tall, white buildings on Fifty-seventh Street, New York. . . . Schorr told me that he'd gone out with her on his first night in. He'd arranged it all about a

week before. It cost him sixty-eight dollars in phone calls, but he said it was worth it. . . . Kelmscott was his dream of the future.

"They were at a quiet bar after the show that night, and Schorr was beginning to feel a little tired—he'd been traveling for two nights—so he took out some Felixine and took two tablets. She asked him what they were, and he told her, and she said she'd like to try some. Schorr gave her two tablets of Felixine, and then—the way he put it—the world began for him. . . . The Felixine seemed to make Miss Kelmscott forget that she was a 'classy dame' and to make her remember she was a natural woman, and just that—and that Schorr was the only man in the world!"

Stephenson noticed Al trying not to grin. He smiled himself. "No, it wasn't anything to lead to orgies. Figueira—it wasn't anything like Spanish fly. I'm telling this part of the thing badly," he said, "because I don't like it—but I have to be fair to Schorr. It was just a relaxing feeling the girl got. It was a feeling that she was human, and natural, and that Schorr was her friend—and, quite naturally, her lover. She was happy to have him love her, Al . . . Figueira! . . . She lived with him for five days like that."

"Felixine?" Al said.

"That was just an accident, I think. . . . It could have been aspirin."

"But wasn't that quite a secret to give you, Stephenson? Her name and all?"

"He was so sure of me," Stephenson said—without smiling. "That's pretty clear, isn't it? You see, I'd talked pretty straight to Schorr."

"I didn't mean anything," Al said quickly. "I didn't—honestly! Go ahead. I won't interrupt again."

"No! No, break in on this whenever you want." Stephenson held out his cigarette pack, and Al took one. "Break in on it whenever you want. Break it up, if it gets too bad."

"Go ahead, Stephenson!" Al laughed.

Stephenson lit their cigarettes and then looked down at his. "Schorr didn't talk much about it after that. He just told me a glowing version of the wonderful time he had and then he let it go at that. . . . He'd wink at me often, when we saw each other afterwards, and then, when I was ready to go on furlough, he asked me where I was going. I told him I was going to Buffalo to my aunt's, and he asked me if I was going to stop over at New York. I said I might, and then he went into town and spent his next two months' salary on a bracelet for the girl. . . . He gave it to me in a beautiful, wrapped-up package." Stephenson smiled again.

"When I was leaving, I thought he was going to change his mind, but then, he looked at me again and grinned—and gave it to me." Stephenson grinned here, too.

"When I got to New York," Stephenson said—going more slowly now, "it was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and I thought that was a good time. I had time to wash and eat, and then get up to her house at about eight. She'd just be going out then, I figured, and I could give her the package and let it go at that. I was a little tired, but I didn't worry too much 'cause I figured Schorr's name would carry me over. Besides, after I remembered Schorr's telling me about her, this girl seemed pretty high above any ambition I might have. . . .

"She lived in one of those apartments on Riverside Drive—with an elevator and no bells. I asked the elevator man about her and he said, 'Why, there's Miss Kelmscott over there,' and he pointed to a girl who was standing at the mailbox. She turned around when she heard him say her name, and then started to walk over to me."

Stephenson looked down at his cigarette, and then out at the quiet valley. There was no sound there. He looked at Al for a moment before going on. "For the first time in my life," he said, "I didn't feel like falling through the floor when I was meeting a girl. I didn't want to be away from there. . . . That stupid son of a bitch, Schorr, had left out the most important thing—that was the softness. She was just as beautiful and glamorous as he said—yes, and in the same special, uncommon way!—but there was a softness there that made looking at her like"—Stephenson looked at Al to see if he was going to laugh—"like being in a soft wind in the place you'd like to be most in the world." He looked at Al again. Al nodded and tried to show the understanding he felt in his face.

"I understand, Stephenson," he said. "Go ahead."

"And she gave you the sense that she was looking at you alone," Stephenson said, "that for the minute you were getting all that. I should have really wanted to run like hell—but I didn't feel like running or falling. I felt like being 'Stephenson' there! . . . She said, 'Did you want to see me?'—I'll remember that as long as I live—and her voice had the same softness; not the mushiness or emptiness some voices down here have, but a softness with an intention to it. She held out her hand, too, and I was so Goddamned flustered and bowled over that I put Schorr's package in it. 'That's from Schorr!' I said. 'Oh, thank you,' she said. 'Thank you very much.'

"While she was opening the package, she asked me if I was a friend of

Fred's. I said, 'Yes,' I was. 'He doesn't have many friends, does he?' she said. 'No,' I said, 'no.' And she looked at me.

"The bracelet was out, then—it was a beautiful bracelet—but she held it up in her hand and laughed a little. I had to laugh, too—that a smart guy like Schorr should think a bracelet would impress a girl like that!

"All this time, I was waiting for her to start moving, to say good-by or something like that—and I wondered why I didn't run—even now—and then she put the bracelet back in the box and said, 'Could we go and have a drink, and talk just a little? I have some time.'

" 'All right. Sure,' I said. I was beginning to sweat with fear—I still say I didn't want to run away from her, but now it seemed that everything I always feared would be centered on the two of us. We went out into the street, and she didn't take my arm—and I was glad—but then, when we were crossing the street, she grabbed my hand and I held it, and I wouldn't let it go when we got to the other side. She didn't pull it away.

"I don't know what we were talking about—I don't know if we were talking at all. I wanted to run someplace with her—I wanted to tell her she was the most wonderful girl in the world because she looked like everything I'd ever wanted and she didn't make me afraid of her, and she didn't pull her hand away. I wanted to hold that hand forever." Stephenson stopped for a moment. Al watched him.

"When we got to the bar," Stephenson said, "it was still all right. It was one of those dimly lit places and we got a booth right away. We were still talking and not talking—I mean, I didn't have to think about it. And I couldn't remember any of it even though I thought I would remember it forever.

"It went like that through the first drink—she drank Dewar's White Label—but then, at the second drink, I began to feel low as hell. I was a little stronger then, and I was looking around. I saw how a waiter looked at her, and I could see a guy in another booth looking at her—and I looked at her again; and I saw her for the second time that night. Saw her truly and real. . . . What a bloody fool I was, I thought! Oh, what a Goddamned fool you are, I said to myself. Do you think you can have all that wonder?

"Then, before the second drink, I was getting desperate. I kept thinking that she'd be going out after this—with some normal person, with some 'man' like the waiter, or the guy across the way—in a much better and different way, of course, but with all that normal feeling to eat her up.

"I was desperate—I think I was a little hysterical! I took out the

Felixine box and said, 'That was a pretty tough trip. I think I'll have to take a couple of these.' . . . My hands were trembling, and my lip was trembling, but I tried to keep my voice calm. I kept the box very evident, too, so that she couldn't help noticing it. She said, 'Oh, that's all right. You don't have to apologize.' Then, after a moment, she said, 'They're very nice. I like them. Could I have a couple?' . . . I gave them to her," he said, and he stopped.

After a long moment, he said, "She had red hair. It wasn't really red, but it was a living brown with red flashes in it. It was soft and flowing in the back and with a wonderful curly bang at the front. She had bright, beautiful—soft—eyes and the most beautiful profile I'd ever seen on a woman. When she looked straight at you and talked, you thought of how much you wanted her, but when she turned away to look at something and you saw all that beauty, you knew how foolish it was to hope. . . . She had a full, living, lovely body and perfect legs—they looked slim and wonderful to me, and I found out later that they were perfect. She was a queen! She was tall and straight—with beautiful loveliness all between. . . . When she was with me, later, and I used to watch her moving around in that quick, free way on low-heeled shoes, I thought she was a perfect impression of the most beautiful thing in the world—a gazelle! And when she'd look away, she seemed as tensely alone as a gazelle."

He stopped again—just for a moment. "She took the Felixine with her drink," he said. "We took them at the same time. . . . She didn't look away, then.

"She had a nervous habit of touching her hair at the back of her neck—fluffing it out with her fingers. Now, she took off her hat, and fluffed her hair out and shook it a little. She would put her hand up to the back of her neck and push the hair out and then shake it. I was looking at her all the time, and she smiled at me, then, and said, 'You can do this,' in a softer voice. 'I'd like it if you did it.'

"I went around the table and sat next to her—and her perfume went to my head faster than the drinks and the Felixine. I didn't know what I was doing or thinking. I must have looked like the last child of God! . . . I put my fingers on her neck—under her hair—very softly, and they began to move of themselves. I loved them for it!" Stephenson laughed nervously. "I blessed them! . . . My fingers would caress her neck and then pull themselves out through that soft, beautiful hair. . . . Then, I had to put my lips there. I touched them to her hair, and wanted to die.

. . . She turned to me. She turned very suddenly and put her hand up to my face. All her fingers caressed my face. 'Don't look so worried, darling,' she said. 'Everything's going to be all right—and wonderful!' "

Stephenson started to cry.

Al started to bite his lip. He didn't know whether to reach over and pat Stephenson's shoulder, or just sit quietly—as if he weren't looking. He felt like laughing nervously—but he was afraid even to smile. Stephenson might lift his head suddenly and catch him—and misunderstand.

Al looked out at the valley. More shots had cut the darkness just a moment before. Then, a torrent of sound, short spurts, afterwards. It seemed like nothing compared to Al's memories of the Course. The bullets had seemed perpetual, then, and the mines had blasted every corner he crawled to.

Al tried to think of this for a while—so that he could be away, and not embarrass Stephenson. He kept watching Stephenson, though. He'd look at him every moment—so that he would not miss the time when he was ready to go on.

Stephenson's whole chest was shaking with his sobs. He cried with his head held down, and the cigarette poised in his hand. Just when the sobs seemed to be getting worse, he stopped himself suddenly in a very quiet show of control. He held his face down as he said, "That shouldn't have happened."

"Why not?" Al said. "No—that's something to cry about."

"I never cried before."

"Now, you're in!" Al said. It sounded so sincere that they both had to laugh. "Tell me about the best part of it," Al said.

"Well, it isn't the best part of it, now. It's the worst part of it because it will never happen again."

"No more Felixine?"

"No, that was just an . . ."

"I was only kidding."

"It was just an accident, really," Stephenson said. He laughed, but didn't seem too happy. "It was just a lucky trick. Something else might have done it. It was just a lucky break!"

"How long did it last? I don't mean the Felixine."

"Ten days, we stayed together," Stephenson said. "The first two nights, it was at her apartment—her mother and father were up at her sister's place in Connecticut. We stayed at the apartment. It was. It . . ." He

was stumbling a lot, now, and he had put his head down again. Still, Al didn't think he would cry. This was too real, now, for that. "First, I have to tell something—I have to tell you what this was like, Figueira," he said. "It wasn't that she got loose . . . and that we rushed up to bed. It wasn't like that. . . . It wasn't a bitching heat, or anything like that. . . . On the street, we held hands and she was practically the same as going over—but I had a feeling that she could be mine, that she was going to be mine, now. . . . There was a new elevator man on at the apartment, and she said, 'Hello!' in a polite, but friendly way. She even joked a little with him about his last hangover. He drank a lot.

"Then, when we got to the apartment, the real thing began to come out. The really real thing! This was the real thing—that you loved her and she knew it, and she didn't think beyond that! . . . You didn't have to shout, 'I love you! I'm going to make love to you.' She knew that, and she let you know she knew it—without saying a word. The way she walked around—the way she looked at you! She seemed to be stopping right there—that you loved her, and that was all. You stopped there forever.

"It wasn't like having to take it very easy with her. I didn't have to think of maneuvers and things to do—and she didn't make any coy gestures or things like that. . . . I would have hated that. The way I wanted to dream it in the old days was just the way it was happening. . . . Everything seemed to come of itself—just the way we both wanted it. Both!—that was the big thing, because everything she did brought us closer together—and everything she did was natural. . . . She went around the apartment, taking things off chairs, putting on the lights—just the right lights; closing the big shutter doors—and then, mixing drinks in the kitchen. . . . When she started to mix them, she called to me to come out there. 'I want to look at you,' she said. . . . I started to say something—I stumbled at it, but she said, 'You don't have to talk,' and made a funny little gesture with her head. She smiled at me when she did it, and I thought her eyes were alive with everything I was dreaming of.

"She put the drinks on the coffee table so that we could both sit on the couch. We clicked glasses. . . . I put my glass down after a few sips, but she held hers. . . . Then, when she leaned forward to put her glass down, I put my arm around her, and she came back on to my shoulder—in a natural, easy way. All the blood was rushing into my head and chest. I said, 'I love you,' into her ear. 'And I love you,' she said. 'I love you, darling,' I said. 'I love you!' 'I love *you,*' she said. She was turning around to face me. . . . I kissed her lips, and she came all up into me."

Stephenson rubbed his forehead very hard, now. Don't cry, Stephenson, Al thought, please don't cry, now.

"It was October then," Stephenson said—he was still looking down, "but it wasn't cold. . . . I had on a pair of her father's pajamas, and I was in bed waiting for her before she came. . . . I think you can tell how I felt. . . . I had the light out. I didn't even want to watch her comb her hair. I was too afraid. . . . Then, when she came into the bed and put her arms around me—I could smell her perfume and feel how thin her nightgown was, and I knew her again for the third time—the way she really was, herself, out in the street, walking around—I started to bawl. . . . I got sore as hell at myself. I tried to be rough with her." He stopped. "She took my two hands and shook them, and I could see her making that same funny little gesture with her head. 'I told you it was going to be wonderful,' she said. Her voice was very low, but I could still get the softness. 'Don't be excited,' she said, 'it's going to be all right—and wonderful!' Then, she started to kiss my eyes and my mouth, and she seemed to be slipping off her nightdress without trying."

He wasn't rubbing his forehead, then, but he still had his face down. He didn't seem to want a cigarette, either. He looked at Al, and then looked down again. Al took out a cigarette and lit it.

"You're telling it just right," he said to Stephenson. He was afraid that Stephenson might think he was showing off sex. "Just right!"—Al almost whispered it, the mood was so strong.

Stephenson stayed looking down for a moment, before he went on. "I'd take all those terrible years again," he said, "and all the embarrassment of those first times, just to have it again like that when it got to be right. . . . I don't have to tell you that, Figueira."

I wish you would, Al thought, but "Go ahead," he said.

"We got a big room in Queens," Stephenson said. He was a little calmer now—as if he'd really gone through that embarrassment and come out "wonderful." "We had some trouble finding it, but even that part was pleasant. . . . Afterwards, she went to her office and brought back some work. . . . She cooked, too, and I cooked.

"I think she went to see her mother a couple of times, because once, when she came in very excited, she said, 'My mother knows where I am. If she calls downstairs, when I'm not here, just tell her I'm fine.'

"That was the first time I'd seen her excited and angry like that. I was a little afraid of what to do. I just stayed quietly around her—hoping like hell that I could do something to help her. . . . We didn't go to a

show or a bar that night, but at about eleven o'clock, we went out for a long walk and sat in the park. . . . The tears were running down her face. I felt I was going to cry myself. 'If I could only do these good things, naturally and easily,' she said. 'Why am I such a hypocrite?' . . . I just held her hand and tried to tell her something—tried to tell her how wonderful and real she was.

"I didn't want to talk too much, because I didn't want her to think—I wanted her to be just quiet and calm. . . . Then, after we'd been sitting there for a while—mostly without saying anything—we started walking home. She took my hand and said, 'Say the first thing you want to say.' 'I love you,' I said. 'For always and always?' she said. 'Will you love me for always and always?' She made that funny little gesture with her head, and opened her eyes wide and even jumped a little. . . . I knew it was wonderful again.

"She'd say, 'For always and always?' every time, then, whenever I tried to tell her how much I loved her, how very, very much!—so I just started to say, 'For always and always!' after that. She used to laugh, and it was wonderful to hear her laugh, and to see her. Christ!" he said. He rubbed his forehead very hard, then. "Hell!" he said, almost sobbing. . . . Al looked away.

When he started again, Stephenson was quiet and strong. "She had so many ways of making you feel that you were the only other person in the world for her. . . . One night, when we came out of a late show in New York, she said, 'I'll take you to a nice bar, if you promise never to take another girl there.' 'I promise,' I said—and I thought, 'I'll never, never, never even look at another girl.' Another girl?—there didn't seem to be another girl in all the whole damned world.

"Another time, it was very wonderful because we'd tried one of those superior tricks I'd heard the guys talking about. I knew I'd been in heaven, then. . . . She was kissing my ear very quietly and she said very low, 'That's for us. That one's for us. You'd never do that with another girl, would you?'

" 'Don't talk about impossible things. There'll never be another girl,' I said. 'Never, never!' . . . 'I don't want you to say that,' she said. . . . She was still talking very softly and kissing me—but I could feel something very definite in the way she thought about all this.

"We had never talked at all about the strange, wonderful thing. I knew she kept taking the Felixine because the box in the drawer was getting low, but we never said a thing about it. If you thought about something

like this whole wonderful thing happening to you, you'd think you'd have to say something about the Felixine—because it would seem to be the most important part of the setup—but we never did. . . . And, after the first two days, there didn't seem to be any need to talk about it. The first two days were too wonderful to worry about a thing like that, and, after that, you could almost forget it.

"I know she never forgot it. It was always at the back of her mind—but she kept it well back there. She never wanted me to think about it. She pushed it away from us whenever she thought I was going to bring up that—or what we were going to do afterwards. She kept it to herself for the both of us. That's how I was able to forget about it. . . . Forgetting about it was part of the whole wonderful thing.

"One night, I was out of bed when she woke up suddenly. She cried out for me—her voice was frightened! When I went running back, she put her arms around me tight and put her head on my chest. I remember how she said, 'Schatzie—Schatzie, I thought I was alone. That's the one thing I'm worried about,' she said, 'not having anyone to love me. Promise me you'll never . . .' I was starting to stutter out . . . to tell her how much I . . . how I'd always . . . but she stopped me, dead. 'Love me, now!' she said. 'Love me, now. Now!'

He stopped again. Then, he seemed to know what Al had been thinking. "She called me 'Schatzie,' " he said. "I read that in a good novel once, and I liked it. I told her about it. . . . I called her 'Gazelle,' at first—but then, 'Red' seemed better. 'Gazelle' had all her class and glamour, but 'Red' seemed more intimate—as if all that class and glamour belonged to me alone—the way I saw it when she wore an apron, or just a house dress."

"How did it break up?" Al said. He seemed to feel that he should say something, then.

"She started it on the eighth day. We were home that night. We were sitting on the couch, just feeling happy and together. She said, 'Schatz, I've got something to tell you.' She said it in the very serious, soft voice, and she was sitting and looking away from me when she said it—but I could still feel that she was very close to me. . . . She could do that," Stephenson said.

"Before that—when I'd thought of this minute coming up—I used to figure that my heart was going to stop. . . . It thumped like hell, now, but I didn't feel scared. She was right there with me—she wasn't moving away. That's what made it so easy. . . . She looked a little tired, too,

and I was so filled with love for her that I would have let her say anything—and liked it!

" 'You've got to go to your aunt's for at least a day,' she said. . . . I remember that so clearly. 'So you'll have to start the day after tomorrow in the morning. I'll leave here in the afternoon. . . . I told them I'd be back at the office, then, and then in the night, I'll go home. . . . You call me from Buffalo at the office, and we'll talk.' She said it all in the same quiet, serious voice—and then she stayed looking out like that after she'd stopped talking. . . . I put my arm around her and pulled her back to me. 'For always and always!' I said. 'All right,' she said. 'For always and always!'

"We didn't go out at all that night, and we didn't go out the next night—just for a walk. . . . Coming back, she was holding my hand and just talking. She was telling me about a French movie she'd seen years ago, and that she'd liked very much. Then she stopped and was quiet for a moment. I said, 'I found another bottle of Dewar's White Label today. You can drink your favorite drink, tonight.' . . . She didn't say anything and went right on walking—but I saw her starting to grin. Then she turned suddenly and shook my hand and made that gesture I liked so much. 'May I really have a drink?' she said. 'May I really have two drinks?' "

Stephenson smiled, and then bit his lip with pleasure. "I grabbed her. I had to! She was the most wonderful girl in the world. She was mine—for that moment I forgot about losing her. . . . She looked at me, and then kissed me on the lips very softly. 'I'm going to flirt with you, tonight,' she said. 'You'll see how really nice I can be!'

"She always kept insisting that she wasn't beautiful—that she wasn't wonderful! She kept calling me the man of exaggerations. She was too heavy, she said—'And even my mother admits I'm homely,' she said, 'and you know how prejudiced they are.' . . . All of that was just like a little kid saying that it wasn't raining when he wanted to go out on a pouring day.

"She had two coats at the apartment—a white sport coat, and a black fall coat—I know the names." He laughed—sadly, Al thought. "She was beautiful in both," Stephenson said, "in practically the same way. . . . When I first met her, she was in black. I thought she was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. She was living beauty in black—her hair shone, her eyes shone, and her body seemed living movement in that black. . . . Then, the day she cried, she wore a soft brown—the dress,

the shoes. Her hair seemed soft brown—her eyes, her skin, all of her seemed a soft, loveliest brown that would be like moving velvet under your hands.

"When I spoke to her from Buffalo," he said suddenly, "she was still 'Red' I mean, she was soft and intimate—and she sounded as if she were thinking of nobody in the world but the two of us. . . . But she was different—I don't mean that she wasn't all 'Red,' but the wonderful part, the Felixine part, was pushed back now. . . . She said not to write or call her, and she wouldn't write to me. 'But I want to see you soon,' she said. 'I want to see you soon. Very soon.'

"The day away from her had knocked the hell out of me—and of course, I knew where I was going back to. . . . I didn't want to cry, but I could hardly talk. I stayed sitting there for what seemed a long time—without talking—and then her voice said, 'Stephenson, are you still there?' a little excitedly. 'I'm still here, Miss Kelmscott,' I said. I was trying to be nasty—and not cry again. Just like a damned fool! 'Say that again!' she said. She was very cold. 'I'm still here, Red,' I said. 'That's better,' she said. Then, after another moment, the coins clicked. We said good-by. 'Good-by, Schatz!' she said. 'I'll talk to you.'

" 'Good-by, Schatz,' " he repeated in a lower voice. He was pushing his cigarette slowly into the ground. He'd been field-stripping them as he'd finished them before. Now, he ground the cigarette very deeply and looked at Al. "That was two months ago," he said, "and that's all!"

"Yes. . . . Except that Schorr will go on his furlough before you do."

"You catch on fast, Fi . . . Al!" Stephenson said. The "Al" was very kindly.

"I've been around a little," Al said.

Stephenson stood up suddenly, and pressed his hands deep into his pockets. "Schorr found out right away, you see. He saw it right away. . . . He wanted to beat the shit out of me—but he had a rating, then, and he didn't want to lose that furlough. . . . Now he doesn't speak to me any more," Stephenson said. "I think it was one of the reasons he wanted to get into Recon, too. . . . I don't think I blame him."

Stephenson looked down at Al. "Thanks a hell of a lot for listening to me," he said. Then he walked away suddenly.

He started to walk down toward the valley, but stopped at the road. Al sat back and looked out. . . . It was still very quiet and serene here. Al Figueira was so filled with Stephenson's story that this did not seem rare to him. He had heard of what a soft detail fireguard was, but he

had never believed it. Now, it did not seem to mean anything, even though the quiet went so well with the mood he felt. . . . No cars had passed, and there had been only two other bursts of firing.

Al went back to lie on his blankets. He stared up at the sky through the open back of his tent. . . . He did not notice the cold. When Stephenson came back, he showed Al where the latrine was, and offered him a cigarette.

As they smoked, Al said, "Do you want to talk about it, now, Stephenson?"

"No. Just thanks very much for listening!"

"Well, listening isn't any good alone. . . . I got a lot out of it, too."

"It was good for me," Stephenson said. "Very good! I had to tell it—I had to tell it to someone who understood."

"I understand it, all right," Al said, "and I'll certainly think about it." He felt glad that Stephenson did not want to talk, now. He himself wanted to think about the story—even to "dream" about it in all this quiet. It was so much with him.

The next morning, they talked only little about it. . . . It was between them like some mist or new thought, but they spoke only little about it.

"You want to do something, don't you, Stephenson?" Al said, after they'd come from breakfast.

"I have to!" Stephenson said. "I was going nuts until I talked to you about it."

"Well, when does Schorr get his furlough?"

"In about two weeks, I think."

"That isn't the important thing, though. . . . I mean, it isn't a question of Schorr against you. It's your getting in touch with that wonderful girl again."

"Yes! And I can only do that by getting to see her."

"You don't want to write or call her?"

"I can't, Al," Stephenson said. "It's no good trying anything like that over the phone or in a letter. She's a girl you have to sit and talk with—to look at and talk to."

After a moment, he said, "I have to tell you a little more about her. Then you'll understand."

They were on fireguard again, two days later, and Stephenson told Al some new things about Red. . . . They hadn't talked much about it

back at the bivouac area—Stephenson hadn't seemed to want to talk there, and Al had held in any questions he felt. It seemed to Al that Stephenson felt much better just to have him know about it.

"I think I've been unfair to her," Stephenson was saying to Al that second night on fireguard. "I just told you about her actions, and nothing about what she thinks, and what kind of a girl she really is. . . . This thing worries her a lot—it seems so false to her! I don't mean the thing itself but the way it happens. . . . She's a wonderful, natural girl and she can make a guy the happiest guy in the world. She's got a fine, living mind and the loveliest body in the world—and they both make every dream you ever had about a woman come true. They did for me—I know they did for Schorr, too. I think mine were much better—I'd been working on them longer." He laughed a little bitterly.

"What seems false to her is the way it happens—the Felixine part! It's not the same, but it's a little like a strait-laced girl having to get tight. . . . She hates that part of it. She would want to be Red, naturally. That's why she feels so sensitive about it.

"I'd be afraid to call her now," he said, "to write to her. I couldn't tell how she felt about me, now. It's been so . . ."

"But when she spoke to you in Buffalo . . ." Al said. "She still seemed Red, then."

"That was so soon after," Stephenson said. "Now, it's been long. . . . She's been living the other life all this time. I might mean nothing to her, now. I might just be a mistake. I know how sensitive she is about the Felixine part. . . . That's why I'd want to be there—seeing her and talking to her. I'd want to be ready with everything—even the Felixine."

"But Schorr?"

"Schorr's different, Al! He's an old friend of hers. . . . Meeting her was a lucky break for me. It wasn't the same with him."

"I see," Al said. "I see."

When he talked to Al, now, Stephenson would grow tense and excited. He talked over Al's interruptions, ran over his questions. He'd lost any shyness he'd had at the beginning and would just pour out.

Al didn't mind this. He was definitely interested in Stephenson's "trouble." His own life was so messed up right now that it was almost a pleasure to think of such a clear-cut problem as Stephenson's. Then again, Stephenson never talked of it except when they were alone—and that was mostly on fireguard. On fireguard, everything else was so calm

and quiet and perfect that Al could have given all his attention to even a boring thought—and Stephenson's was not that.

After this second time on fireguard, the outfit left the bivouac area and went into camp. Stephenson took a bunk next to Al's, and Fox, who was on the other side of Al, began to make constant remarks about when Al and Stephenson planned to get married. Al laughed at him, but the next night they went out on fireguard, they got Fox the third man's job. It was the Recon's night firing, and men were really needed then. Fox felt a little better about things and became more friendly.

Stephenson didn't seem to mind having Fox around. They all had to work that night, but he still had some chance to talk to Al alone. When they were in camp, Stephenson went along to all the reunions of the old ASTP specialists at the Service Club. He never said much and Al knew that the things they talked about—transfers and transfers—had little interest for him.

Al felt guilty as hell about this—just to have him sit there. He thought Stephenson had much more stuff than most of the blowhounds who had gone to ASTP—still, whenever he tried to bring him into the conversation, Stephenson would just make an appropriate remark and let it die.

Al knew that the worry was in him all the time. He wondered at the ease with which Stephenson seemed to hold it down. He knew that it stayed with Stephenson for every minute of the twenty-four hours in every day. He knew, too, that Stephenson slept very little and then dreamed of it. Sometimes Al envied Stephenson—he had such a definite world.

Al and Fox went to the movies every night, but Stephenson never went. Whenever they'd come back, though, Stephenson would still be awake. . . . He'd laugh at Fox as he dumped his clothes around, and he would always ask Al how the picture was. Al would sit whispering to him—so that they would not curse them down at the hard-working, sleeping end of the barracks—and then would always end with the same thought. "You ought to come once in a while, Stephenson," he'd say.

But Stephenson never did. Al went to the movies to get into another world. He figured that Stephenson didn't go for the same reason.

After they'd been in camp ten days, a new training schedule started. Al was one of the ten men selected to go to medical classes. "There's your luck again," Fox said. Stephenson said nothing.

A week later, when the class went down to Shreveport to watch a three-day demonstration of field medicine, Fox almost wept. Stephen-

son watched with a grin as Fox said good-by to Al at the truck. "That kid's really fond of you," he said, a moment later.

"It's just envy," Al said. "Want anything from the big city, Stephenson?"

"Hell, no. . . . Thanks! Just let's talk about it some more when you get back. O.K.?"

"Absolutely. I think we've been away from it too long."

When Al came back from the three happy days of ease in Shreveport, Stephenson was on KP. Al saw Fox before he saw Stephenson. "Hey, Al," Fox said before they could get started on anything else, "who's Red?" Fox was grinning broadly, getting ready to laugh.

"Red?"

"Red! Red!—the woman Stephenson's been telling me about for the last two nights!"

"Been telling you?"

"Well, not telling me. . . . He was talking about her in his sleep, so I had to listen."

"I hope you didn't tell him about it. Jesus Christ, Fox!"

"No. . . . I wanted to ask you, first."

"Sometimes you've got real brains."

"That's from hanging out with you," Fox grinned.

"Well, don't tell him," Al said. "Don't say a thing to Stephenson."

"O.K.—but who is she?"

"I'll tell you sometime later. . . . Don't say anything to Stephenson, now," Al said.

"O.K.! But, listen, Al!"

Al turned back.

"There's something else—Stephenson had a fight in the barracks last night, with a guy named Schorr—a guy from Recon."

"My God!" Jesus, how fast this is moving! Al thought. "What'd you do?"

"What'd I do? Are you kidding, Al? . . . You know me."

"Well, I thought you'd take care of Stephenson."

"He didn't need it! He didn't need any help, Al. . . . They stopped it right away, anyway."

"They did?"

"Schorr didn't want to fight much, anyway. He started it, but he's going on furlough in a couple of days. . . . He wouldn't want to lose that."

"No," Al said. "No—he wouldn't. No. . . . Stick around, Fox," he

said. "I'll see you tonight." He started to walk away again, then turned and waved to Fox and grinned sheepishly. Fox grinned back. "Are you in it, Al?" he said.

"No." I wish I was, he thought—even though it is going so fast, now.

There was no time to get to Stephenson that afternoon. Al had another class. A critique on the trip followed that, and he didn't get to see Stephenson until that night, when he came back to the barracks to wash and shave. Stephenson was asleep on his bunk with his full fatigues still on. He looked even worse than Al had thought he would.

Al let him sleep, and went to shave and shower. He was sitting on his cot, dressing, when Stephenson started to toss in his sleep and to mumble. From what Al could hear, he was talking about that last walk with Red. He was saying, ". . . never have to flirt with me. You never had to flirt with me. . . . I can see all of you, now." Al shook him when his voice went suddenly high.

"Stephenson!" he said. "Stephenson!" Stephenson opened his eyes slowly. "You were mumbling," Al said. Then, "How are you, guy?"

Stephenson didn't say anything. He got up and sat on the side of the bunk with his head down in his hands. "When'd you get back?" he said. He did not look up.

"This afternoon. . . . Listen—get dressed and come on down to the late show with me."

"I'll walk you down—if you'll wait." Stephenson was watching him now. Al thought he looked like hell.

"Sure! . . . Maybe I won't go in. Maybe we'll just talk."

While Stephenson was showering, Matthews came over and sat on Al's bunk. He talked to Al about the fight with Schorr. Matthews seemed very proud of Stephenson. "He's getting to be quite a man," he said, "having fights over women."

Matthews was a tech sergeant in Medical Supply. He drank too much, but Al liked him.

"Well, I'm glad they broke it up fast," Al was saying.

"Oh, sure! This is furlough time." Matthews winked. "Old Stephie really hit him, though," he said. He seemed more proud than surprised.

When Stephenson came out, Matthews grinned at him and raised his fist. Stephenson made a poor attempt at a smile.

Stephenson didn't start to talk until they were outside and going along the back road. Then he started to talk strong and fast. It was just

like that first night on fireguard, except that now there was no hesitation—and no apologizing.

Al had thought that he would start to talk about the fight with Schorr, but he started on something that seemed very strange—for a while. . . . He held his hands in his pockets as he talked, and he didn't turn his eyes from the front of the road once.

"I was the son of an Episcopalian minister," he said. "The sect isn't important, because he would have been the same in any church. . . . He was a great, modern churchman on every point but one—sex. He was sixteenth century on that, and black as hell on it. He could get away with it, because he was so modern on every other point—so very liberal! But he did his best sermon work against sex—and he did his very best work at home.

"I had a brother who was just a couple of years older than I, and he made life hell for us. Any little joke of ours that had some kid's dirt in it called for a thrashing. . . . Once he beat my brother with a cane because my brother hadn't hit me when I stopped to watch a couple of dogs copulating. He put my brother in front of me. 'Strike him!' he said. 'Strike him!' He had the look of a crazed lunatic. My brother said, 'No! No. I won't hit him. I love him,' he said. Then the son of a bitch brought the cane down.

" 'Strike him!' he said again. He was almost hissing it. 'Strike him!' My brother was crying, but he shook his head. 'No, no!' he said. 'I love him. Love him!' . . . He'd bite his lips to keep from crying when the cane came down, but he cried all the rest of the time. . . . I don't know what I was thinking, then. I was just numb.

"My father hit him until he fell. My father!"

Stephenson stopped for breath.

"We hardly ever saw a woman in the house," he said, "and my mother dressed like a flour bag. If she had breasts, I never saw the form of them —and I don't think anybody in the world ever saw her ankles except him. . . . My mother's sister was a schoolteacher. She came to visit us once in a while. Then, when her husband died, she came to live with us. . . . She started dressing like my mother after the first day. She fell right into our damned pattern!

"Then, one night, my mother and father were at a social. My brother was twelve and I was nine, and my aunt took my brother to bed with her. . . . I was scared as hell, and I think my brother was, too. . . . My father and mother came home early, and he heard them as soon as he'd

started up the stairs. He grabbed the bronze cross we had on the hall table and ran into the room. He beat them both to death. . . . He hit them around the head."

Stephenson walked more slowly, now. His hands were deep in his pockets and he turned to watch Al's face. Al did not say anything.

"I was going to be the savior," Stephenson said, after a moment. "I was going to tell about the terrible thing my aunt and my brother had been doing. I was going to tell about my father's 'saintliness.' I was going to be his star witness!" He stopped again.

"They coached me!" he said. "My mother and my father's friends told me just what to say—and how to say it. They were counting on my 'youthful innocence' to give it just the right touch. 'Then they won't take your dear father away from us,' my mother said to me. 'You wouldn't want that, would you?' . . . *Dear* father, *dear* father! Just that—all of that! . . . Nothing about my brother. . . . I didn't give a damn about the woman—but there was nothing about my brother. Nothing, nothing —not even a damned, bloody word!

"I was only nine," Stephenson said, "but I knew just what I was going to do. I didn't have to coach myself. I knew just what I was going to do! . . . When I got to the witness stand, I was shaking like hell—but I had the thoughts all ready to go, and I got ready. . . . And I still knew enough to say it straight and not get hysterical. Those old bastards in the courtroom almost jumped out of their chairs—still, I think some of them liked it. . . . My father almost had apoplexy, and my mother fainted.

"I stood in the witness stand and leaned my hands against the railing. I can remember that speech word for word. 'Father was mad,' I said—just loud and natural enough to keep it under a shout. 'Father wanted to keep f——ing Aunt Alise. Aunt Alise didn't like Father to f—— her. We heard her yelling at him every night! "Go away, you old bag! Go away!" . . . But Father would stay. We heard him there all night, and we heard Mother crying. . . . When Father and Mother went out, Aunt Alise said to my brother, "Come on to my room. You're nicer than your father." . . . Father found them and got mad. Father said . . .' Then the bailiff put his hand softly over my mouth and I saw that I was crying.

"I saw my mother fainted—and my father's red, glaring face. The jurymen were all looking at him. . . . They gave him thirty years and he only lived two. . . . My mother died the next year."

After Stephenson had stopped, they walked on for a few moments

without saying anything. Stephenson was staring ahead. Then he stopped suddenly and put his hand on Al's arm. "That was the first part of the story, Al. You should have heard that first," he said.

"No. No, it's all right."

"You see, Red meant the end of all that. I never think of my father any more, and I can think of my brother without wanting to cry. I'm not marked. I'm not different."

"I know it," Al said.

"Listen, Al," Stephenson said. He gripped Al's arm hard. "You can say 'No' to this, Al. I'll understand it. I won't think any more about it. . . . I've been working up my nerve for two days to ask you this—will you change furloughs with me?" Al's furlough was due in four days, and changing of places was permitted. "You've got a right to think anything you want about me," Stephenson said—he was watching Al's surprised face—"but I never thought of asking you until two days ago. I can't stand it any more. I know it."

"Stephenson," Al said, "when I said I knew you were O.K., I meant it. I think you're all right, now. You are."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean that you're all right—that you're cured. . . . I'm not thinking about the furlough now. I meant to tell you this before. . . . You're cured. You're normal, Stephenson! You could approach any woman, now. There's no fear. I don't think there's any fear. You know what it's about, now. . . . You fought for a girl—you acted like any other guy. . . . Why don't you just think of Red as the first wonderful girl, and let her alone, now?"

"Look, Al—just say 'No.' Don't talk to me like that."

"I'm not 'talking to you like that.' I know a little about these things. You say yourself Red's a glamorous woman who might not even see you without the Felixine. What are you going to do—feed her that stuff all the time?"

"Yes! Yes—if I have to. If it takes Felixine, I'll have the Felixine. . . . My pride doesn't mean a Goddamned thing if I can't have Red. . . . And listen, Al," Stephenson said. He gripped Al's arm tightly now. "This is a hell of a tough thing, but I've got to say it. If I don't get a furlough right now, I'm hitting out. . . . The hell with it!"

"We're going over soon."

"I don't give a damn! . . . I can't!"

"I was going to say, 'Yes,' without that," Al said. "I would have said,

'Yes,' anyway. . . . You can talk to the sergeant tonight if you want."

Tears were making Stephenson's eyes look bright in the near darkness. He took his hand down from Al's arm, then lifted it again suddenly and squeezed his shoulder. "Jesus, Al—thank you! Thank you," he said. "I'll . . . Thanks, Al!"

"It's all right," Al said.

Stephenson went through the Infiltration Course the next day so that he could take the early furlough; and then, on the day after, he took a previous turn on KP.

Late this second afternoon, Al was coming in from the Motor Pool when he saw Stephenson walking up from the barracks with an open letter in his hand. Stephenson was walking fast, and, when he saw Al, his face broke out in the biggest smile Al had ever seen there. He ran up to Al and clapped his arm with the letter.

"What is it? Is it good?" Al said.

"It's from Schorr! A special-delivery air mail! . . . And I know it's true, because I know him!"

"What's it about?"

"She's cured!" The smile went even wider, and Stephenson pressed Al's arm. "She's cured—Red's cured!"

"Cured?"

"Her family took her to a psychiatrist—and she took the treatments. . . . The Felixine won't work any more—and that jerk of a Schorr writes to me and thinks he's breaking my heart!"

"But, now . . ."

"Don't you see?" he said. "Don't you see?" He had grabbed Al's shoulders with both hands. "Now, she's really mine. Now, she really belongs to me forever! I've got her forever, now! No one will ever know Red again. She's mine!

"And you can have your furlough back, Al. You can have it," he said. "I'm going to tell Presterburg right now." He did not seem to want to take a breath. He did not seem to have to. "Thanks a hell of a lot, Al!" he said. "Thanks a hell of a lot!" he said again. He pressed Al's shoulders hard. "Thanks! Thanks!"

Stephenson watched Al's face for a long moment—as if he wanted to feel certain that Al understood. Then he smiled, clapped Al's shoulders again, and turned around. He was saying, "Thanks!" again as he went away, and started for the orderly room on a run.

# THE LIBERATION

by

Marjorie Stengel

It was funny that Grandma should be the cause of it all. They hardly ever talked to the old lady. And she, in turn, never said much, except for an occasional vague mumbling, to which nobody listened and which was always left hanging in mid-air. Grandma never could carry a train of thought for a very long time.

Yes, it was the strangest thing the way that little family was bickering and squabbling all the time just because Gran, who lived with them, was getting senile.

There was the matter of dinner, for instance. It was awful. It was getting quite impossible to have Gran at the table with the two of them, Mrs. Ward and Virginia.

There had been a time when, just so long as Gran's plate was heaped up like a day laborer's, she was content to sit quietly, to move her trembling fork slowly and steadily through huge mounds of food, to clear everything away, to wipe clean the surface of the plate with a piece of bread and then ask for more.

But of late she had become a problem even about food. Virginia hated having any of her friends for dinner because Gran was getting worse and worse. Mrs. Ward didn't know what to cook for her mother, for these days Gran just peered at the food that was set before her, as though it had some active secret life of its own that fascinated her. She would pick out little pieces, move them to the rim of her plate, and then, round and round, round and round, swab it about with her fork. And whatever she *did* eventually put in her mouth, she chewed for a moment and then spit out.

Really, it was disgusting. Every night Mrs. Ward said that from now on Gran was going to get nothing but oatmeal. Every night she said that starting the next day she was going to give Gran dinner before the two of them ate. Every night she threatened the old lady with the reminder that Gran would have to have dinner in the kitchen if she insisted on acting like that at the table. But none of these things could she bring herself to do.

Because of all this, there were those explosions at dinner. Virginia would say something like: "Oh, for God's sake! Anybody watching her would think our food was full of roaches or ground glass!" With these words, she would jump up, fling down her napkin, and go into the living room. She would light a cigarette and pull the smoke furiously into her lungs, thinking with terrible intensity: *I hate it here, I hate it. I'll move away, that's what I'll do. I can't bear it, I can't.* Waves of self-pity would wash over her as she brooded about how she had to work so hard at her job all day and then come home to *this.*

At these times, Mrs. Ward felt a cramp of weariness and nausea grip her insides. It was so repetitious, so hopeless, that the very sight of her mother filled her with rage and fury. Maybe for one second, as Gran's old pale eyes blinked at her from behind the thick lenses of her glasses, Mrs. Ward would feel a twinge of pity. But that just made it worse. Her voice would be the harassed, scolding one that is directed at naughty children; then, before she knew it, she would be shrieking at the old lady.

"You can eat *that,* Mother!" Mrs. Ward said. "Or can't you even *chew* any more? If you don't want it, just *leave* it. But don't put things in your mouth if you aren't going to *swallow* them!"

Mrs. Ward clenched her hands under the table. She felt that if she didn't hold one hand in the other she would reach out and smack the old lady. Her own mother.

"Oh, Lord," she softly whispered to the ceiling with a great sigh. Then she called coaxingly, "Come on, Virginia. Come finish your dinner, dear."

"I don't know," Gran was mumbling, over and over in a chanting way. Her voice was like a thread now. A thin, old, surprised voice, astonished at the miracle of its own sound. Frail and high and not too distinct, like the humming of a plane or the drone of an insect coming to the ear from a great distance.

Being pulled out of the dark, dreamlike place where her mind turned its slow, shadowy circle, being jerked into the bright, square-framed

scheme of a moment, was terrifying. It made Gran start to tremble even more, so that her fork knocked, rat-tat-tat-tat, against the china plate.

"My teeth," Gran mumbled, ". . . my teeth . . ." Her eyes filled with tears of confusion. In her terror she blew her nose in her napkin. Mrs. Ward would have screamed at Gran for this, but she was looking away at the moment and didn't notice. Besides, she felt suddenly a little ashamed.

"You don't have to eat anything you don't want," Mrs. Ward said, almost gently. "But don't think you'll have any cake."

She knew how Gran loved desserts. All old people did; they never could get enough sweets. Gran was always stealing chocolates from the candy dish on the coffee table, quickly stuffing as many as she could into her mouth, and hiding the rest in the pockets of her dresses, or maybe behind the sofa cushions that now showed marks of squashed caramels and chocolate stain.

"Why, it's criminal to waste all that perfectly good food," Mrs. Ward went on. "Especially today, when people all over the world are starving." Mrs. Ward's face was a brooding frown. Her thoughts moved sympathetically along an imagined road crammed with the sad spectacle of hungry refugees.

"Now, if you've finished you can leave the table," she said to her old mother. "Just fold your napkin and go to your room."

It took a few moments for this to penetrate. When she understood that these words were addressed to her, Gran groaned and started the difficult struggle out of her chair.

"Go ahead," Mrs. Ward prompted. "Go to your room."

Once out of the chair, Gran clutched the table, took a few unsteady steps, turned a weaving, shaky circle. A glass of water near her plate shook perilously; a sudden small wave slopped over the rim onto the tablecloth. Utterly confused now, Gran seemed to be looking for something. She considered the ceiling, the table, her daughter's face, her own thin, bluish fingers clutching the table for support. She wanted to get away from the whirl of nervous sound that crashed against her ears. And she felt that she was doing something wrong. But what? At that moment, like a lantern slide clicking into place, a gentle, womblike half-darkness settled over things.

"What?" Gran mumbled through its shadows. "What room? Where is my room?" This place was strange to her. Her daughter's face was one she had never seen before.

"Oh, never mind," Mrs. Ward said. She bit off the impatient phrase and then, feeling ashamed, gave a great sigh. "Sit down."

She got up to help settle Gran in the chair. Then she looked into the adjoining room. Virginia was sitting on the couch, looking at the evening paper, turning its pages noisily, and blowing out angry puffs of cigarette smoke.

It wasn't really fair to the child, Mrs. Ward thought. She sighed again. "Virgie," she said, "come in and finish your dinner."

"I don't know," Gran crooned, "I don't know." It was true. She didn't know. But even as she chanted her perplexity, the comforting gray black was disintegrating, growing thin in spots, like a sky becoming light.

Gran looked into the frightening glare of the present, with the blur of their two faces looking over at her. And suddenly something fleeting, birdlike, crafty, marked her face with swift awareness. She remembered.

"My teeth!" she said, half timidly, half triumphantly. "My gums are so *sore* from these *teeth*. . . ."

Mrs. Ward leaned back in painful exhaustion. Virginia said bitterly, "I can't even invite my friends any more. I'd be ashamed to have anybody see *that!* It's disgusting!" Her tone was sour, beaten, the voice of a nineteen-year-old banging and complaining at the stoniness of life.

Every week there seemed to be something new. It was almost interesting to remark how swiftly Gran was tumbling down the green hill of existence, rolling like a stone to the dark valley of senility, the eyelessness and thoughtlessness, that lay at the bottom. Only it wasn't interesting. For they saw nothing precisely biological. They only saw (terrible fear) that someday one of them might grow old and be like this.

When Gran sat in the big chair near the window, her white hair drawn into a knot at the back of her head, a somber black dress coming modestly down over her thin old legs, she looked, really, quite nice. She always sat in that one chair and, in the way of the old or the despairing, could stay there for hours, sometimes picking and scratching at some real or imagined spot on her dress, sometimes just staring at the random piece of reading she had happened to pick up and now held on her lap. At these times she looked almost like Whistler's *Mother,* all concentrated gentleness and the eyes busied with a bit of reading and the lips moving as if whispering pleasant words.

Only, of course, Gran wasn't reading. Even though she stared so fixedly at the magazine or book she was holding Even though her gnarled fingers now and then actually turned a page. It *looked* all right—to the

outsider. It appeared, in an immobile, pastel way, almost sweet. But if you *knew,* if you went close, you might see that Gran was holding the reading upside down.

Then what *was* she mumbling? Because if you got close, you could always hear a light hissing coming from between those troubling false teeth. Virginia often wondered about this. Was Gran remembering old secrets, perhaps? Or praying? Nobody ever knew.

Oh, yes, the stranger coming into the living room and seeing Gran framed in the window saw, too, something charming, subdued, gentle. A young man visiting Virginia for the first time was always a little surprised, it was true, to hear from Gran how much he had grown since last she had seen him. But he never really minded. If Virginia whispered to him that the old lady thought he was someone else, well, that explained it. But even if Virginia didn't warn him, it was O.K. with the young man; *he* didn't think the old lady was crazy. He might even smile at Gran while waiting for Virginia to get her hat. And when, each minute or so, Gran turned to him and blinked and repeated, "My, my, you certainly did get taller since I saw you," he might even say (slight croak of sympathy curling the edges of his words): "Well, it *has* been a long time."

But Virginia hated her grandmother for always telling strangers how they had grown since the last time (which was never) that Gran had seen them. It was only if she were showing off for a boy friend that on these occasions Virginia could laugh, a laugh all sucking-in of breath, that she could say, a sweet-bitter giggle marking off her words: "Guess what Gran was reading yesterday? The *Moonlight Sonata!* She just picked it up off the piano and sat there reading it for two hours. Reading *music,* can you beat that?"

Virginia laughed, but she was frightened every time she thought about something like this. When she and the young man were outside the door, even as she put her fingers into her gloves, she said, half to the young man, half to God: "Oh, I hope I *never* grow old!" She shook her head, perhaps to remind herself about her pert, gay hat. She pulled her lips into the widest possible smile, so that her dimples would show. Also, so that she would not cry and spoil her make-up.

Lots of things happened, one by one, like water dripping on a stone, like the mounting depression of a rainy day, that made Mrs. Ward begin to think about putting Gran in a home.

In the morning, as she talked to her friends on the telephone, Mrs. Ward said things like: "I don't know what I'm going to do about Mother. She's getting to be such a problem, I'm at my wits' end." She lowered her voice to a mere whisper, a bubble of sound; she spoke very softly, so that each bubble of word would break and disintegrate the moment it reached the other end of the wire, so that it would be heard, but not, she hoped, remembered. She said, "It just gets worse and worse from day to day. I don't know what to *do* with her. Why, she doesn't even keep herself *clean* any more."

Shreds of comfort came to her from the other end of the telephone wire. Sympathetic *tsk-tsk*'s. The comparing of this with a problem some friend had known, either firsthand or from some book or play.

"I'm just a wreck," Mrs. Ward said. "I don't know what I'm going to *do*."

Mrs. Ward was feeling her way. She was waiting for someone else to put into words the glimmering idea that had a while ago thrust itself into her own thoughts. So she liked it best when some friend had had the identical problem. That was the greatest comfort, to have someone say: "I know exactly what you're up against. Believe me, I know. I had the same thing with *my* mother. I almost went insane. Last year when she broke her hip . . ."

These discussions always moved in the same guided way. They always agreed about how it wasn't fair for children to have this problem. Then Mrs. Ward mentioned Virginia. She said, "It isn't right for the child. She's on pins and needles for fear Mother will embarrass her in front of her friends."

Then Mrs. Ward told about one of the things Gran had done recently. How she had come into the living room right in the midst of Virginia's cocktail party. She had appeared suddenly in her lavender kimono, her white hair hanging down her back, her false teeth gone from her wrinkled face, and she wasn't even wearing her bedroom slippers. Her ugly bunioned feet stuck out of her nightgown and moved shakily into the living room, where Virginia and her friends were drinking and laughing and dancing the rumba.

"Poor Virginia," Mrs. Ward said. "She was so embarrassed she just wanted to die. She cried all night. I know just how the poor child felt. But honestly, what can I do? Tell me frankly, what can I do?"

Eventually, these conversations switched off to something else. A coming bridge game. A place that repaired electric gadgets inexpensively. A

new way of preparing some casserole. But always, before they disposed of Gran, Mrs. Ward said passionately, "I just hope and pray I never get old. I want *my* daughter to remember me the way I am now. I never want to be a burden to her."

Gran's room was the one that opened off the kitchen. It was small and dark, built originally with a kind of disdain for its future occupant and supposed to be a maid's room. Its window looked out on a courtyard, and it had a perpetual shadowy look of evening.

This last, perhaps, was one reason why Gran wouldn't get up in the morning. It was almost as though she knew about the mysterious eternal darkness into which she was sinking and wanted to be ready, lying in bed, when it came. Almost every morning Gran pretended she was sick. She went so far as to actually moan, and she kept her eyes tightly shut, only opening them and quieting down when Mrs. Ward brought in her breakfast on a tray and fed it to her spoon by spoon.

But nothing was really wrong. In an hour or two Gran would struggle out of bed and come into the kitchen, asking for her breakfast, forgetting all about not feeling well.

Mrs. Ward screamed at her about being lazy. "And *sly!*" she added bitterly. "Just lying there, waiting for someone to come and serve your breakfast in bed! To wait on you, as though you were a *princess!*" Mrs. Ward's face was flushed with rage. Sarcasm burned her tongue like a swallow of too-hot coffee. "Princess *Pest!*" she shrieked in fury. The words choked her. Her breath came so fast she thought she was going to have a heart attack.

One reason Mrs. Ward fought with Gran about staying in bed was because of what the doctor had said. When the doctor came, Gran had to be bathed and helped into a fresh nightgown. Her long white hair had to be grasped in the hands, transformed from flying, witchlike strands into a neat braid down her back. And the window had to be flung up, in an attempt to let out the odor of age and decay that filled the room.

Virginia sometimes mentioned this smell of growing old. She said, wrinkling her nose, "Honestly, Gran just smells awful. I can't bear to have her too near me."

And it was true. This strange, distasteful odor hung about the old lady. It came into a room with her. It was on her breath, in everything that belonged to her—her bureau drawers and the closet where her dresses

hung. When she shuffled past, the nostrils tried to close, resisting that unpleasant smell of age.

Mrs. Ward didn't like to talk about it. But she did say to Virginia: "It's because she never goes out-of-doors any more. She doesn't get enough fresh air, that's what it is. At least she used to go for walks. But I can't even get her to go out of the house now. She says her feet hurt."

Just the same, every time the doctor came to examine Gran he said she was in the pink of health. Physically, at least. He said to Mrs. Ward: "Of course, the mind is something else again. But physically she's a wonderful specimen. Amazingly well preserved. I wish all the young people today had a heart and lungs like that."

But he warned Mrs. Ward about the danger of permitting Gran to lie in bed all the time. "She's got to be up and moving about a little, or she'll have a stroke," he said. "Then you'll really have an invalid on your hands."

One day, as the doctor was folding his stethoscope into his black bag, he said he wanted to talk to Mrs. Ward. The two of them were standing in that tiny room in the glimmer of light from the single electric bulb that hung from the ceiling. Gran lay in the narrow bed with her eyes closed, and the doctor patted one of her gnarled hands that lay on the cover and said in his accustomed, cheerful, summing-up way, "Don't worry, this girl is fit as a fiddle." Then, as Mrs. Ward reached out to snap off the light, he put his hand on her arm for an instant. Just as though to reassure himself about something he saw in Mrs. Ward's face.

They went into the living room together. The doctor looked at Mrs. Ward in a cool professional way, then he said, "I think today *you* need the doctor more than your mother does."

There it was—the very thing Mrs. Ward had been waiting for. This sympathetic tone, this promising prelude, was like the soft, beckoning opening of a door. And suddenly her self-control broke; it smashed like a piece of fine glass. It shattered and flew about, completely irretrievable, as if never again to be gathered up and fitted together. Suddenly she was sobbing and weeping.

"I can't stand it," she moaned, over and over again. "I'll go mad if I have another day of it!"

While he waited for her hysteria to abate the doctor's face had its accustomed smear of bland patience, of the repose it had learned out of

necessity, out of being a physician for many years. Once he put his hand on Mrs. Ward's shoulder and whispered soothingly, "Now, now, you must control yourself. You mustn't let yourself get out of hand this way." And once he looked down and tapped his stubby surgical fingers on one knee of his dark-blue suit. But for that, he sat patiently, like a person waiting for the rain to stop so that he might take his coat and go outside.

At last, when the room was quiet except for the leftover whimperings of Mrs. Ward's outburst, he began to say the thing that Mrs. Ward had been waiting to hear from her friends. He leaned back a little as he talked, and sometimes he looked upward, as though he were in a hospital amphitheater and throwing a ball of words to a listening circle of interns.

What the doctor proposed was that Mrs. Ward put her mother in one of the state hospitals. It was, of course, the way out. It was, actually, what she herself had recently thought of—but in secret, and swiftly, like the darting of a moth toward a lamp. But now that the words were spoken, it was just like seeing a monstrous steam engine coming toward her.

Mrs. Ward drew back. She shook her head in middle-class horror. At the same time, her eyes had a responsive look of being opened to the light, of listening, of understanding what was being said. And each time the doctor spoke a phrase like "intelligent thing to do," or "only possible solution," or "kindness, not cruelty," she relaxed a little more into the back of the chair.

"The commitment form is a simple matter," the doctor said. "But there's just one thing . . ." He hesitated, because he had an idea of how Mrs. Ward was going to take this. "It's part of the regulations that one of the city ambulances would have to come for her. These things are done with rule and system, you know."

It was an odd thing that came into Mrs. Ward's mind. Just a momentary flickering vision of the old lady being lifted onto a stretcher and covered with a blanket (a thin, brown one, she was sure). And then that image was rubbed away, just as though some hand had put an eraser to her thoughts. Instead, she now suddenly saw a clear, shining day that came skimming out of the past and stopped right in back of her eyes:

They were at the seashore. She herself was sitting on the sand, and the whole world lay there about her: In the blue-and-white singing day. In the warm, glistening facets of sunshine. In her new red bathing suit. In the little sand pail and shovel that lay between her knees. Her mother

was sitting nearby. Her mother was all dressed and well concealed in the shade of a large beach umbrella, but she had taken off her shoes and her stockinged legs were exposed to the sunshine. She was sewing. She was making a pongee dress. The pattern had been cut, the pieces had been sewed together, and now, mysteriously, when it came out of her sewing bag, it was a whole dress. All that she was doing now was embroidering those French knots around the sleeves and collar with light-blue thread.

A spasm of new tears seized Mrs. Ward. Only this was a sad kind of weeping, like a soft wind going through a tree and gently shaking some raindrops from its leaves and branches. The only thing she was crying about, really, was that little seashore scene lying in back of her eyes like a painted postcard. And the remembered pongee dress. It was as though she could actually feel the dress in her hands, and she wept and said, "Oh, dear God, don't ever let me grow old."

The ambulance was absolutely out of the question. About this Mrs. Ward was adamant, and even Virginia said that would be too much. So when the Saturday of departure arrived the doctor arranged for a Miss Jennings to come and take Gran to the hospital in a taxi.

Mrs. Ward spent the whole day before thinking about getting her mother ready. Only there wasn't any packing to be done. It wasn't like helping someone get ready for a trip. The doctor said Gran wouldn't need a thing, except maybe a hairbrush and comb and toothbrush (false toothbrush).

With much heaving and strain at her muscles, Mrs. Ward had lifted the weight of her mother in and out of the bathtub. There was no use trying to get the old lady to wash herself. Gran felt the excitement going on about her. Like a dog sensing death, she was aware of an odd buzzing in the air, a swimming, flicking panorama of strange tumult. It whirled about her with such fury that she didn't understand a single thing Mrs. Ward screamed at her in that frenzied way.

In the end, Mrs. Ward had even to wash her, thinking, as she moved the washcloth over those sunken limbs, *Oh, the ugliness of growing old!* Mrs. Ward clung to this thought, brooded over it, first with heartache, then with rage. She felt a kind of stormy resentment at God that He should have permitted this to happen to her.

"Christ," she said, partly to some mournful sky, partly to the old woman, "dear Christ, why do I have to be punished this way? *Why?*"

When the old lady was finally dressed, Mrs. Ward brought one of the kitchen chairs into Gran's cell-like room, placed it directly under the electric bulb, and sat her mother there so that she might comb her hair.

Gran was sitting there when Virginia came down the hall. Virginia didn't work on Saturdays, and she came down the hall with light, quick steps, wearing slacks, glancing into the little room as she went by the kitchen.

The old odor of rank decay came out of the door. Just as the girl passed, she noted Gran's hunched, resigned back and the white hair hanging down in its listless way, hanging down and feeling the touch of a comb going through it. Mrs. Ward was holding the comb, and Virginia thought for an instant about this hair being combed by another hand and how, at one time, Gran surely must have combed her own hair with just such rhythmic, purposeful strokes.

Gran's hair really looked beautiful. It didn't have its accustomed look of yellowed ivory now because the night before it had been washed and blued. It looked so white now, so startlingly white, and so soft, that Virginia almost followed her impulse to go into the room and touch Gran's hair, to move the flattened palm of her hand downward over its marvelous whiteness.

In about half an hour, Mrs. Ward brought Gran into the living room. She settled the old lady in the big chair across from where Virginia sat pretending to be reading, then she bit her lips and wiped some tears out of her eyes and blew her nose and hurried to her own bedroom. Virginia heard the door bang closed and, imagining her mother's weeping, strained her ears for some sound of it.

Gran sat very still, looking across the room in her empty-staring way. She didn't have her glasses on because she had broken them two weeks before, and Virginia thought suddenly how it seemed a long time since Gran had broken those glasses, and they hadn't bothered to have them fixed. They hadn't worried about whether she could see all right because she had been managing quite well without them, stumbling about the house the same as before. And anyway, Gran never did any reading or sewing. And she never went outside. But Virginia thought maybe she ought to have them now, now that she was going to a strange place alone.

It was then that Virginia noticed the handkerchief pinned to Gran's dress with a safety pin. Oh, how awful! How *sad!* It seemed, somehow, to be an emblem, a sign that it was all over now, that Gran was really

quite helpless. The sight of it pinched the girl's heart, filled her with sudden shame and pity. Had they really done this, she wondered, had they really been so *cruel?*

Virginia thought, *Does she know? Is it possible that she suspects?* She was afraid to look at Gran's face, for fear she might see some clear accusation there. And time was going. The minutes ticked out of the clock on the mantel of the mock fireplace, and each one was painful. Each tick seemed to draw and pull at Virginia's flesh, interfering with her heartbeat, causing that odd snuffling in her nose, the beginning of tears.

In a little while the strange face and person of Miss Jennings came in. She wore a tan coat and a brown hat with a long green feather. She asked Virginia to get Gran's coat, and Miss Jennings held it on her arm while she efficiently helped Gran up out of the chair.

Gran smiled. She said to Miss Jennings, "My, my, you certainly did get taller since I saw you last."

Virginia, meanwhile, fixed her eyes on Gran's coat as Miss Jennings started to help Gran into it. It looked embarrassingly shabby, terribly worn. But how could it be? For it reminded Virginia of what a long time it was since Gran had gone outside, since she had worn this coat, since Virginia had even seen it.

"Come on, Grandma," Miss Jennings said in a coaxing voice that promised all sorts of wonderful things, "we're going for a nice walk together. Would you like that?"

And suddenly Virginia began to cry. Suddenly her mind said stormily, *Let her stay, let her stay!* and she ran out of the room, her loud sobbing flying after her. It was funny what she was crying about. Not the actual departure, really. Not Miss Jennings' coaxing directions. Not all the scheming covering-up of the truth. No. Only the sight of Gran's black coat, and the white handkerchief pinned to the old woman's dress.

# THE BROTHERS

by

Jo Sinclair

Ben felt shy and uncomfortable with the principal. She was new since he had gone to Patrick Henry, and though the office looked much the same as it had when he had been called in for skipping classes or for flunking his fourth-grade English tests, she was different. Old man Moore, the principal ten years ago, had been tough and you knew he was going to give you hell, but knowing it had made things easier.

This lady, Mrs. Walker, was different. She talked too polite. She was kind of fat and old-looking, but she didn't laugh much, and she talked the kind of words it was hard to really get.

"What do you really and truly think of your brother, Corporal Klonowski?" she said.

"Lenny?" He shifted stiffly, looked at her for a moment, then began again to tug at his overseas cap. "He's a good kid. I always thought he was."

She was sitting behind a big desk that was covered with books and stacks of paper, and she had a pencil in one hand. There was a notebook open in front of her; he had the idea she was going to write down everything he said.

"Well, now, Corporal," she said, and then paused until he looked up. She was frowning.

"Ma'am?" he said. His face felt hot. He saw her eyes go to the bars and the Purple Heart, and when she looked up from them again she was smiling.

"How long will you have here, Corporal?" she said.

"I've got forty-five days, ma'am," he said. "I got home yesterday." He hesitated. "My mother said you had to see me, and I better come right away today. She said she was pretty worried. Said not to say anything to Lenny about coming here, either."

The pencil tapped. He noticed how white and pudgy her hands seemed. "I've had a number of talks with your mother, Corporal. You're right, she is worried."

He wished she'd quit calling him Corporal. It sounded funny when she said it. He wished she'd come to the point, too, instead of talking so slow and dignified. He had a headache. His mother had awakened him at nine and begged him to go to school right away.

"Lenny is gone," she had said in Polish. "The principal wants to see you right away. She told me, as soon as you come home she has to see you, or Lenny will maybe go to jail. I'm afraid she'll talk to Pa, Ben."

He had not heard or spoken Polish since he'd been drafted. Sitting in front of the desk now, he remembered his mother's voice and the sound of the Polish, as he had remembered them in England and then again in Germany. He tugged at his cap and waited for the slow, monotonous voice to get on with it.

"You've been overseas for the past year and a half, your mother tells me. Has she written you about Leonard at all?"

"My mother can't write," he said stolidly. "My sister used to write once in a while. My married sister. But she didn't write much about the kid."

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Walker said quickly. "But your mother has talked to you about Leonard?"

"She told me some," he said. "We didn't have a lot of time to talk yet. She told me a little bit today. Lenny's been bad, she said. Stayed out of school, huh? Got into some fights with the kids. What else? She said there was a lot of trouble a couple of weeks back, and you wanted her to bring my father here."

"He's been stealing," Mrs. Walker said. "Your mother seemed very loath to say anything to your father. I think she has difficulty understanding me. I have never talked with your father, but the pastor of your church tells me he is a very fine and righteous man. Hard-working, poor, yes, but a man who insists that his children be brought up the right way."

"Yeah," Ben said, "he works hard, all right."

"Your mother was very insistent about not bringing him here. I told her I thought a man should handle Leonard's case, and she said that perhaps his brother would talk to him. You."

"I'll talk to him," Ben said, his forehead wrinkled. "My mother understands you, all right. See, my father'd kill him if he knew Lenny stole something. My father beats a kid right away if there's any trouble. He's always beat us. That's why my mother didn't want to tell him."

"I don't believe in sparing the rod, Corporal," Mrs. Walker said with great dignity.

"Ma'am?" Ben said.

"I believe in spanking a child, Corporal!"

"Oh, sure. But my father really beats up on you. With a stick. All of us got it. My sister was pretty sick once when he did it to her. Right after that, she ran away and got married."

He noticed that she was red in the face, tapping the pencil hard. "Your pastor tells me that your father feels the great responsibility of bringing up children in a—a neighborhood that is nearly a slums."

"Sure," Ben said. "He's always been scared that we'd turn into crooks, or maybe murderers, I guess. He always figured he could beat anything like that out of us."

He looked at her, decided to tell her. "Two of my brothers ran away as soon as they were old enough. Same as my sister. I don't blame my mother, do you? Why should he beat up on a kid like Lenny?"

"For a very good reason," Mrs. Walker said. She was talking faster now. "Because Leonard is headed straight for prison unless something is done."

"Yeah?" Ben said, starting to breathe hard. "Why, what's the kid done?"

"He was picked up in the five-and-ten-cent store, with two boys, all of them from my school, you see. Their pockets were crammed with stolen property. Now, fortunately, he was turned over to a policewoman, who brought him to me instead of sending him directly to the Detention Home. The two boys agreed that he had been the leader."

"What'd he steal?" Ben said. "Candy? Stuff to eat, or what?"

"No," Mrs. Walker said triumphantly, "it wasn't food of any sort. I might have understood that. When a ten-year-old boy is hungry, I can understand his stealing food. His pockets were full of those little military pins and insignia. Little trinkets which he obviously stole simply for the pleasure of stealing."

Ben said nothing. "Your brother," Mrs. Walker continued, "is on the verge of juvenile delinquency. Would you like to see him in the Detention Home, Corporal Klonowski?"

"No," Ben said dully. His mother's face came to him, and he said, "How come you didn't let them put him in there?"

"Because, my dear Corporal," the woman said, "I pride myself on my job as a principal. It is the duty of the school to influence the neighborhood, not vice versa."

"He oughtn't to steal," Ben muttered.

"He has stolen before," Mrs. Walker cried immediately. "He has stolen chalk and pencils and paper, right here. He has stolen the time and effort of his teachers. And he has stolen from his fellow students. Stolen their good intentions."

"Ma'am?" Ben said. His head was aching furiously, and he felt terribly tired, as though he hadn't slept at all.

"What I mean," the slow voice said, "is that he constantly influences other children. He leads others into staying out of class with him, into these trips downtown on school time. Into stealing, Corporal."

"That's bad, all right," Ben said. He wanted a cigarette. He wanted to get the hell out of this dark, book-crammed office that was all heavy with words and with his mother's faded eyes, the feel of his father's hands, the strangeness of what was happening to Lenny. And he had a flash of Lenny's adoring eyes, his thin face that resembled Ma's so much, the way the kid hadn't said much yesterday, had just stared and stared at him, the way he'd come up finally and fingered the medal and the ribbons. His fingers almost not daring to touch.

He looked up from his twisted cap. The principal was watching him, her lips pursed. He felt all of a sudden how he hated her, how Lenny must hate her. There wasn't any way of talking between her and people like Lenny and him.

"And there is one other thing, Corporal," Mrs. Walker said to him. "I know how your father must feel. After all, he was not born here. He came to this country on trial. Of course he wants his family to be good, decent Americans. In a way, you are all on trial. I'm sure you understand?"

"Oh, sure," Ben said, trying to concentrate on her words.

"You must realize that Leonard's terrible actions really touch all the Polish people in this neighborhood," she went on. "If he steals, if he turns into a delinquent child, why, then, the reputation of all the Polish people here suffers."

Ben listened intently, his eyes on her face. She really looked sorry about everything. She looked like she was honestly out to fix things up.

"Well, how do you mean, exactly?" he asked hesitantly.

The pencil tapped. "You know this neighborhood. There are colored people here, and Italians, and of course you Poles. Don't you see what happens? If Leonard continues to behave this way, and goes to the Detention Home, don't you know what the Italians and the colored people will say?"

"What?"

"They'll point their fingers. They'll say, 'See what a Polish boy does?' They may think all Polish people act like that. Steal. Make nuisances of themselves in America. Doesn't that make sense to you, Corporal?"

"I guess," Ben said. He was starting to feel sore. A slow, hot feeling was beginning to creep in his chest, and when he thought of the niggers and the dagos making cracks about his people he began to perspire.

"What do you think I should do?" he said hoarsely. In a helpless, respectful way, he thought that she was a principal, a lady who'd read all those books, who'd talked to big shots and to priests like theirs, and who was always having meetings with teachers and mayors and people like that.

"Leonard is very fond of you," Mrs. Walker said.

"Yeah," Ben said. "He could be a good kid."

"He talks about you a great deal. Boasts of your military record."

"Well, you know how kids are," Ben said. "All you need is a uniform, I guess."

"Exactly," the principal said. She looked excited. "That is my point, precisely, a uniform." She put the pencil down, and cleared her throat.

"What I want you to do, Corporal Klonowski, is to give Leonard a public spanking."

"What do you mean? I don't get it," Ben said.

"Spank him before his class. Before those boys to whom he has boasted about you. Wearing the uniform of which he is so proud."

Ben looked at her. "That'll make him feel pretty bad. Ashamed. You know."

She nodded, smiling, and he felt all confused again, sore about the niggers and confused about hitting Lenny in front of all those kids and his teacher.

"That is precisely the point," the woman said triumphantly. "Believe me, I've spent days trying to think out the best way for Leonard. The best way to save him, Corporal. I was pleased when I thought of this. The point is, he'll feel so ashamed, so humiliated, that he'll have to

mend his ways. The idea of being reprimanded by his soldier brother, whom he loves and respects, before his entire class. Well! You can imagine how that will jerk him to his senses."

"Yeah," Ben said hesitantly.

"I honestly believe that is the only thing that will stop him," the woman said. "I'm thinking of him, and of your parents. And I'm thinking of all the Polish people in this neighborhood."

The mixture of confusion and anger deepened in him. "I want to do right," Ben mumbled.

"Of course you do. We all do. It is our duty, Corporal. Children depend upon us older ones for wisdom, for advice. It is our duty to help them."

"Yeah, I guess," Ben said.

He listened closely as she described the plan. They'd go together to the classroom. She herself would make a little speech to the class and explain why it was being done. Then she would call his brother to the front of the room, and he would spank the boy. The boy would thank him all the rest of his life for this.

Ben followed her out of the office. A bell rang as they walked along the corridor, and Mrs. Walker said, "Please put your cap on, Corporal. You should look as official as possible, you know. That's the psychology of the punishment."

Ben put on his cap, twitched down his jacket. Mrs. Walker stopped outside a door and said, "Please wait out here until I prepare the teacher."

She went into the room and closed the door. Ben's heart was beating hard, and he tried to figure out if he should say anything to Lenny, or just sit there and spank him. How the hell did you spank anybody? You put him over one knee and did it with your open hand. Not with a stick, the way Pa did it. He'd never hit Lenny. He'd punched Stanley a couple of times, and once he and Johnnie had beat up on each other. Never Lenny. But none of them had ever been going to be sent to a bad boy's place, for crying out loud! How'd Ma like that? Yeah, he'd beat the devil out of the kid, all right.

The door opened and the principal beckoned to him. Inside the room, it was so quiet he could hear the extra pounding of his heart. The teacher shook hands with him, but he didn't catch her name, and then he was standing near the desk, his face burning; Mrs. Walker had started to talk.

He couldn't find Lenny at first. There were about thirty kids in the room. Sitting down, they all looked about as old as Lenny. He didn't

want to keep looking up and down the rows, but he wanted to find Lenny quick, while she was still talking.

"This is a very serious time for all of us," Mrs. Walker was saying. "We have with us this morning a hero, a member of the United States armed forces, who has been fighting for all of us, in our country's war. Children, this is Corporal Benjamin Klonowski."

Ben felt all the eyes swing toward him as the voice paused briefly. His eyes dropped for a moment, and he stood there listening to his heart crashing.

"Corporal Klonowski came here this morning for a very serious and worth-while purpose. He is very concerned about the bad—very bad!—behavior of his brother Leonard."

Ben's eyes started their stealthy searching again.

"He feels that his brother must be reprimanded, must be taught that such behavior cannot continue."

The way she talks, Ben thought, it's like I thought about this spanking business myself. Maybe that's the way it's got to be, though, to be good.

"—and Corporal Klonowski is going to administer this public spanking for one reason only. The welfare and future of his own brother, and the welfare and future of all boys who have the mistaken idea that——"

There he was! There was Lenny, in the second-last seat in the third row. He looked so little behind that desk, no wonder he couldn't find him.

At that moment, Lenny's eyes moved from the principal to Ben. His face was very white, and his eyes looked black, like marbles, like they couldn't see. His eyes were so odd that Ben had to look away quickly. All the kids looked peculiar. They were watching him in a sort of scared, waiting way. Like they were waiting for something awful to happen.

"Now, Leonard," the principal said. "Please step to the front of the room."

Everything seemed to happen quickly. The teacher had shoved a chair near him, and he was sitting in it. Lenny was walking up the aisle, but he wasn't looking at Lenny, he was saying inside of him, Now let's get this Goddamn thing over with, now let's get this Goddamn thing over with.

One of the kids, a girl, suddenly giggled in a high, funny way, but just as suddenly she quit, and then Lenny was standing near him, and he could see the thin legs and baggy socks, the brown knickers, the worn-looking leather belt around the pinched waist; he could see Lenny's

hands hanging down in tight fists; he did not look above Lenny's waist.

For crying out loud, now what should he do! Then the principal said, "Children, we must remember that this is a very important, very serious moment in our lives. Let us all take the lesson of this into our hearts. Let us learn from this, each and every one of us."

What made her talk so much! In a rough, low voice, Ben said, "Come on, kid, let's get it over with."

He grabbed Lenny and set him over his knee, started to hit him with the flat of his right hand. The blows were gentle, but Ben kept bringing his arm down in wide gestures so that it would look as if the blows were much harder than they really were.

Ben heard the teacher, behind him, draw in her breath sharply, but there was not one sound from Lenny, or from the kids, or from the principal.

A peculiar thing happened to him, a terrible and insistent thing that grabbed at his stomach. The feel of Lenny's slight, stiff body seemed to start the feeling, the way the skinny, tight little body hung over his knee, the feel of the bony bottom against his hand.

He began remembering things: how Pa's face always looked when he licked them, mad, hard, how he yelled steadily in Polish the whole time he was hitting, all about how they'd have to be good or he'd kill them, he'd kill them; and Ma's face, not mad, not hard, just thin and sharp and faded in the eyes, all bust up into wrinkles so that it looked like it was going to fall into separate pieces, like that time her geranium plant fell off the window sill on the kitchen floor and the pot was cracked into all those shivery lines without falling apart, the way the pot looked the minute before it fell into pieces.

Now he began to really hit, bringing his hand down harder and harder, and faster each time, and he'd almost forgotten it was Lenny lying there under the blows. He began to hit harder and harder, remembering in the dark, misted confusion jagged things about the bombing and the crawling in the night, how the lady had said the niggers would laugh at his people, at him, how hungry they'd been most of the time even if Pa did work ten hours a day sometimes, and sometimes it was like Pa would lick them for nothing, for absolutely nothing but the way they'd sneak away downtown to look at the store windows; and at night the sky would be lit up like all the different kinds of hell Pa'd always told them they'd go to, and first Dave'd been killed, then the others, one after another, and when he'd got it he thought he was gone too, but it

was only his shoulder, and then he'd had to go back, out of the hospital and back to where they were still bombing the whole Goddamn world.

He'd almost forgotten it was Lenny. He was hitting hard, breathing quicker and quicker with the memories, and he could hear his heart all over him, and in his hand too, like a separate, fast, aching heart.

# EAT DUSTY BREAD

by

Teo Savory

By the time Wendy came to work for us, Cyril was fed up to the point of leaving me. Every morning he'd say, "I don't see why you can't run a house decently like other men's wives," and when I'd explain that nobody I knew had to live in damp, unmodernized houses in the wilds of West Kensington, he'd get simply livid and slam out of the room. He was forever shouting about something—the cold bath water, or his laundry, or his breakfast being late, and if the toast got a little burned he'd throw it away. By that time he didn't bother coming home for dinner. He said he went to his Club.

Perhaps it would have been better, I can see that now, if he had left me. But that's what Madge Clayton used to call hindsight.

When I decided I might as well marry Cyril as anyone else, Daddy was no end pleased and kept going on about Cyril's prospects. (Cyril was a solicitor, too, like Daddy and all my uncles, and his mother is well fixed, as Madge would say, though I always knew she'd live to be a hundred.) But while we were waiting for those famous prospects, the best Cyril could provide was that ghastly house on Talgarth Road, backing onto the tracks and rattling from stem to stern every three minutes when a tube train went by. It was hardly surprising we couldn't keep a servant. The kitchen was a dark basement room with an unimpeded view of the area steps and the coal cellar. The cooking had to be done on a coal range and the water heated by a coke stove, and of course the whole house was heated by coal grates. The maid's room, a cupboard up at the top of the house, was cold and sunless, with damp spots on the peeling wallpaper.

All Cyril could afford (so he said) was one servant, so that meant a cook-general. Naturally, only the most inexperienced young girls or the oldest, most decrepit creatures would come to work in that house. And naturally none of them would stay.

While they were there (one week's trial and one week after giving notice), they spent their entire time complaining about the washing, the stairs and the fires, the cooking and housecleaning, and whining if I so much as forgot to order the groceries or asked a couple of people to stay for dinner. If I'd happened to plan anything on their half days out, they made the most awful fuss about changing it.

It got so I couldn't go anywhere, because these Objects were forever leaving. Joyce, who was rather a friend of mine at school, only had to ring up and hear me say, "She's left," to know that I couldn't play bridge with her.

Joyce was no better at housekeeping than I was—the layers of dirt her charwoman uncovered at spring cleaning were simply geological—but she lived in a decent house, just off Queen's Gate, and she had a cook and a nurse, besides a sloppy little housemaid with her cap over one eye who ran up and down stairs for her all day long. Of course, Joyce's husband and his people couldn't do enough for her, because she'd had a baby, right on the dot, nine months after her wedding. A boy, at that. They all thought she was perfect, and I got sick of hearing her held up as such a shining example.

As if it wasn't bad enough having that house to cope with, everyone went on and on at me about having a baby.

When I was turned into Mrs. Cyril Hunter, at a suitably dull ceremony at St. Peter's, Eaton Square, all my relatives gave a sigh of relief. Joyce had got married two years before and already produced her son and heir by the time I made up my mind. I could see all the aunts raising their eyebrows at me, whispering "difficult girl," and sympathizing with Mummy over the teacups. The trouble was, all the men I knew were such bores. I simply couldn't imagine living with any of them. The only attractive man I'd ever met was the one in Paris, while I was at that pension being "finished" there—and, of course, I never think about him any more. What he wanted me to do was wrong, even though I did want to most awfully, and I was afraid of getting in trouble like that wretched girl, May Leonard, that I knew at school. Deciding between being frightened or being bored isn't much of a choice, so finally I went ahead and did what was expected of me.

I got married and left our nice comfortable house on Chester Terrace for Cyril's little dark hole in West Kensington. We started having rows at once. For some reason Cyril, like all my friends' husbands, expected housekeeping to be part of a wife's natural body functions. I hadn't the foggiest notion how to do anything domestic. The only thing I was ever any good at was riding a horse, but owing to Cyril's prospects being so dim, I even had to give that up. Hacking around Richmond Park is no substitute for hunting.

Evidently I was supposed to exchange my riding habit for a house dress. Every now and again I did try to get efficient and orderly, but it was never a success. Those cook-generals just came and went, and mostly we were without anyone. Half the time my face was black from the smoke that came out of the coke stove—which was all that ever happened when I tried to light a fire.

Mummy and Joyce and all the aunts sent people from the agencies. There were Edmunds, Ribbons, and Johnson (Edmunds drank, Ribbons had heart attacks, and Johnson was religious), all old; and there were Rose, Winnie, and Maggie (Rose was saucy, Winnie stole the teaspoons, and Maggie kept white mice in her bedroom), all young; and there were ever so many more whose names and oddities I've forgotten. None of them would stay.

One frightful year went by, and then Wendy came. It was when one girl—Minnie, I think—was ill. She sent Wendy in her place. I took one look at her face (still cheerful after seeing the stove and the range, the flights of stairs, and that cold maid's room with, by then, the leak in the roof) and engaged her on the spot. "Her face was her reference," I told Mummy later.

"When can you come, Wendy?" I asked her.

"Any time, madam, any time that will please *you,*" the girl answered. Fancy! I knew everything was going to be all right when she said that.

The aunts' criticisms—"She's probably Welsh, my dear, not to be trusted," and "You don't know where she came from? You'll be robbed," and "Wendy! That's no name for a servant"—all stopped as soon as they saw her. She was plump, but light on her feet; her curly hair was always fluffy and clean, every day she wore a clean white apron (washed them herself, too), her face was round and smiling. When she looked up, her eyes were dark blue and sort of sparkling, but most of the time she looked modestly down at her feet. She had a nice country voice.

Oddly enough, Wendy looked a little like me. Of course, I am not

plump, muscular rather, and my face shows good bony structure; my hair is fair, not brown. But there was a resemblance—she was a sort of coarser edition.

Wendy got up every morning at six; she scrubbed the front step and polished the knocker, started the fire in the water heater (it never seemed to give her the least trouble), got the range going, and at seven-thirty sharp, in her clean morning uniform, her face bright and her cap on straight, she brought Cyril his tea—good and strong, just the way he liked it.

She kept the house clean, did the washing, and mended Cyril's socks. She did the ordering and shopping, too ("Just leave it all to me, madam" —and I didn't refuse), and pressed Cyril's trousers. She never minded having her half day changed.

She even turned out to be a good cook. We gave little dinner parties, and everyone called her the Hunters' Treasure and said how clever I was. I gave her my old winter coat, and Cyril—though I told him it wasn't necessary—raised her wages two-and-six and had her room done up. Our friends told me I kept house better with one servant than they could with three, and Joyce was always ringing up and asking how to cook soufflés and things.

Cyril took a change for the better. He was still as boring as ever, but he became good-tempered, at least.

I was free to enjoy myself. In the mornings Joyce and I went shopping at Harrod's or the Army and Navy Stores; sometimes we went to an early cinema (seats were only one-and-six before lunch); afternoons we got up a bridge game or went to a matinee; sometimes we just sat over our tea and knitting and had a good gossip.

Everything would have been rosy, then, if it hadn't been for my having to have a baby. Mummy had little talks with me, Mrs. Hunter came up from the country and had one big talk with me, and all the aunts, coughing behind their hands, looked pointedly at my flat stomach. Mrs. Hunter started sending me bottles of port and names of doctors; finally she sent Cyril a check and told him to take me abroad for a week end. It was too ghastly for words.

I tried to talk to Joyce about it. "The trouble is," I told her, "that I can't bear Cyril—physically, I mean."

"But, my good fool, you have to sometimes, don't you?" she said.

"Yes, of course," I answered. "I can't always manage to put him off. But to let him give me a baby . . ."

"It doesn't hurt much. And then there's all that time beforehand when you can keep him away."

"But I'd be—*his,* then," I said. "It's disgusting."

Joyce said, "Oh, you get used to it after a while—like those foul cold baths at school."

Joyce didn't understand what I meant.

At last I decided it would be easier to give in. But only if Wendy would stay. I wasn't going to be left with that house *and* a baby to look after.

"Stay?" Wendy said, giving me one of those embarrassingly bright looks. "If you have a baby? Of course I'd stay, madam. Lovely, that'd be! You won't need to get anybody to look after him or have to worry about anything—just leave it all to me."

"But, Wendy," I said, "babies make so much bother."

"A baby wouldn't be a bother, not for me it wouldn't, madam."

"I can't imagine how you stick it here anyhow," I said, in an absolute outburst of frankness. "This frightful house and so much to do."

"It's not a bad house, madam," Wendy said.

". . . And you never seem to go out," I went on. "Don't you have any friends in London?"

"I'm quite happy here," she said. "You're better to me than any friend, madam, if you'll excuse the liberty."

I'd never actually thought about all the needless trouble I gave her. I felt a bit uncomfortable, thinking about it now, so I said, "I haven't done anything, really."

"This is the nicest place I've ever had."

I thought that the conversation was getting soppy. "You *are* a strange girl," I said.

I'd never have got through the pregnancy if it hadn't been for Madge Clayton. Though she never said anything, I could tell that she understood how things were with me. She kept me cheered up, and that was quite a job.

Right away I started being dreadfully sick in the mornings. It must have made a lot of extra work for Wendy, but she appeared not to mind. She had to bring my breakfasts up on a tray, run all sorts of errands, and serve tea to daily visiting aunts. The light burned in her room late at night—she was crocheting little jackets and caps. (Which was more than I felt like doing.) She never went out because she said I might miss her.

Wendy got plumper and rosier than ever, while I grew thin and sallow. Though I couldn't feel the baby yet, I felt weighted down by it—Cyril's baby. Sometimes, after a whole morning of retching and crying, I'd start thinking about Paris again, but that only made it worse. Cyril was loving and attentive, Mummy fussed all the time, and Joyce was offhand and practical: they all got on my nerves. The only fun I had was with Madge Clayton and her husband.

They were an American couple we had met at Joyce's—plenty of high spirits and money. Madge was smart and clever; she could make me laugh when nobody else could. They took us everywhere with them, the races, theaters, out to supper at places we'd never afforded. When Cyril was too tired to go out, they would make up a party and take me. We had jolly times together. The aunts disapproved like mad—"Who *are* these people?" they'd say, and Mummy scolded me about the new clothes I bought, saying they'd all be too tight in a few weeks; but I didn't pay any attention.

It was in June that I found out about Wendy. After three months of staying in, week after week, on her half day, she asked for time off. It wasn't even her regular day, and she chose the most inconvenient one, when Madge was coming for cocktails. But Wendy didn't care; she got stubborn and insisted on going. I put Madge off and stayed home all afternoon; that evening Cyril went out without me. There I was alone in that empty house. I couldn't understand how Wendy could be so inconsiderate.

She was still out when Cyril got home around midnight. He said, "It's not like the girl; perhaps she's been in an accident," and worried for half an hour, which was as long as he could keep awake. I lay awake all night, but she didn't come.

When the dawn showed, I got up and started watching for her out of the window. At seven I saw her walk down the area steps and come in. I went to the bedroom door and peeked through a crack, so that I could watch her come upstairs. Her face was white and old-looking, her feet dragged, and she was staring at nothing.

After Cyril had gone, and Wendy was cleaning the downstairs, I decided I ought to go through Wendy's things and find out where she could have gone. After all, as Mummy had pointed out in the beginning, we actually knew nothing about her.

I climbed up to the top of the house and went into Wendy's room. It

was clean and tidy. On the bed was the quilt she had made for herself. In the wardrobe hung a row of clean uniforms and her dress. Three pairs of newly cleaned shoes were in a row underneath. In the bureau drawers, her things were in neat little piles—cotton handkerchiefs, a sachet pad, mended underwear, thick stockings, her afternoon aprons and caps. Under the handkerchiefs was a charm bracelet. The bottom drawer was full of things she was making for the baby.

The washstand had a cupboard under it. Bending down—it was no effort, I didn't feel in the least sick—I opened the door and saw two tattered schoolbooks and a pile of clean towels. Under the towels Wendy had hidden her diary. I knew what it was without even bothering to look. I took it down to the bedroom.

It was a little paper-covered book with a gaudy-colored picture of a blonde girl holding a pink rose on the cover. When I opened it, a lock of hair and two photographs fell out. One was of Wendy looking pop-eyed into the camera, the other of a young man with a square face and close-cropped, bristly hair. Wendy was holding one hand up near her face, showing the charm bracelet on her wrist, and she looked as if she might giggle at any moment. The young man stood very straight and looked stern and responsible. They were both dressed in shiny new clothes. The pictures were beginning to turn purple at the edges.

The diary was four years old and at the top of the front page said: "Manchester, Lancs., England. 1935," with a lot of flourishes. The first entry was January 1 and said: "Holiday. I spent it all with Willie." The following Thursday and Sunday also had entries: "Spent all evening with Willie." After that, each Thursday and every other Sunday were marked with crosses.

The diary went on in a monotonous series of crosses until April 15, which said: "Baby is coming in June. I am happy." A month later, Wendy had written: "Asked for help at the Russell Home for Unmarried Mothers, but they refused because I'd not tell them Willie's name."

The crosses had stopped and there wasn't anything else at all before "June 20. I came to the Free Ward at Manchester Hospital."

June 23. Baby born. It is a boy, like I knew. I am very happy.

June 24. Baby was christened. His name is William.

June 28. Baby died.

June 30. I am very sick and must stay here longer. Nurse said Baby died because I am wicked. Why should he die? Now it is better if I do not get well.

August 28. I am out of the Hospital. Must get me a place, have no more money. But I have no reference.

September 10. Got work as charwoman in big office building. I will stay here so as to be near Baby's grave.

There was nothing further until December.

December 12. In Hospital again. They say I have t.b. of the lungs. Doctor says I must go South for the air. What difference?

That was the end. I pushed the book under my pillow and rang for Wendy. I began to tremble. It was the oddest thing—I shook and shook and simply couldn't stop myself. My lips were so dry, I had to wet them every few seconds with my tongue. I thought she would never get up those stairs. I called out to her, "Wendy! Hurry up!" and I noticed that my voice was shaking, too.

"What is it, madam?" Wendy was all out of breath. "Aren't you well?"

I could feel I was smiling. I said, "How are *you,* Wendy? After staying out all night?"

She turned so white, I thought she might faint. "How long did you think you could go on fooling me?" I asked her. "It's no good you trying to pretend any more, because I know all about you." I held out the diary. She put out her hand for it. "No, you don't," I said. I put it back under my pillow. "I'll just keep it, for the present."

She began to cry and she started to sit down in one of the chairs. "I'd rather you didn't sit down, not in my bedroom," I said. "You can understand that, can't you, Wendy?"

"Yes, madam," she whispered. She was ashamed, right enough; she couldn't even look at me.

"Obviously you're not to be trusted out of the house at night," I said.

"You mean because of last night, madam?" she asked me. I just nodded at her. "Don't think *that* of me, madam," she said. "If you've read my diary, you know what date it was yesterday."

For a minute I didn't catch on. Then I realized that it had been June 28, the day her child had died on.

"I've always gone to put flowers on Baby's grave, every year, no matter where I was working," she was explaining. "This year I wanted to even more, like. I went yesterday, but I missed my train home."

"Just the same," I said, "you were trying to pass yourself off to us as a decent girl."

"I was before, madam," she said, "and I have been ever since. That was the only time I ever did anything wrong. I didn't mean to deceive you, madam, but this is the only place I've worked where I felt happy. I couldn't bear to tell you and spoil everything."

She was going all out for sympathy, but I wasn't letting her off. I stared at her till her face turned red and she ran out of the room.

I stayed in bed all morning and read some American magazines Madge had given me. At lunchtime I rang for Wendy again. "Bring me some lunch up here on a tray," I told her. She looked frightful, her face all puffed up and blotched. "I've decided to keep you on, Wendy," I said to her. "On probation. There'll be a few strict rules from now on."

Wendy got down on her knees by the bed—actually! I almost laughed, she looked so silly—and said, "Anything, madam, just so you'll let me stay."

She *was* a little fool: as if I'd dream of letting such a good servant go, no matter how much I loathed her.

From that day on I stopped being sick. I had an easy pregnancy and everybody told me it was becoming. Madge said, "When you Englishwomen are good-looking at all, you're raving beauties!" I never felt tired, and every night I went out somewhere with Madge and her husband.

Wendy grew terribly plain. She lost simply pounds, and all her color; she got all hollow-chested and sort of yellow. Every time she saw me looking at her she blushed, and I could tell that she cried in the night. She didn't get any sympathy from me, though. Cyril couldn't imagine what had come over her. He told me that she ate practically nothing, just drank kitchen tea with no milk in it. (Of course I hadn't told *him* about Wendy.) I said, "Oh, all these servant girls get queer fancies."

In August the Claytons were going back to America. I was fearfully down in the mouth about it. I didn't know how I'd get through the rest of my time without Madge there to cheer me up. Madge kept saying they'd come back in the spring, but her husband said they wouldn't, be-

cause there would be a war on long before then. Cyril would give his irritating laugh at that—"My money's on Chamberlain," he'd say, the poor fool.

The night before they were sailing, I planned a little party for them. I got seats for the Drury Lane show and asked them home afterwards. Cyril said he couldn't afford the Café de Paris and I didn't want to take them anywhere else, so I fixed up a really nice supper at home. A little clear soup first, then a brace of grouse Daddy'd sent us, and a soufflé after. I nagged a couple of bottles of fizz out of Cyril.

Everything was all right until Wendy brought in the grouse—and I saw they were burned to a cinder. I was livid. The Claytons pretended there was nothing wrong, but I could have died of shame. To finish it off good and proper, Wendy let the soufflé drop. There it lay in the bottom of the dish, like a dead balloon. So there was nothing fit to eat.

I was upset enough as it was, what with Cyril's baby coming and losing my friend Madge. After they'd gone, I went back to the kitchen to give Wendy hell. She was still up, as if she were waiting for me. She didn't look at me or say a word.

Next morning Cyril overslept. "Perhaps we didn't hear Wendy bring in my tea," he said. But there was no tea on the bed table.

I got out of bed in a hurry and went up to her room. There was nobody there. On her chest of drawers I saw a note addressed to me. It said, "Dear Madam, I am sorry to go away in the night like this—I know it is wrong—but I cannot bear it here any longer. If I go on seeing you look at me the way you do, I shall do away with myself from shame. Excuse me that I spoiled your supper. I was tired and worried last night, and I never had to cook late before. I was ever so sorry. I will send for my box, that is all packed and ready. And I will try to send someone to take my place. Please, madam, give me back my pictures and the lock of hair."

I told Cyril that the little bitch had sneaked off and for him to go out to breakfast. After he'd gone, I took Wendy's diary, and the pictures and lock of hair, down to the kitchen and burned it all in the stove. Then I went back up to her room and took all her things out of her box and threw them out the window into the yard below. After I was dressed I went down to the yard and threw everything into the toolshed, where we kept our trunks and oddments.

Everything could stay there and rot, for all I cared.

Wendy kept writing letters, asking me for a reference and for her box, which I had refused to give to the carter. I tore them up. As she had no

other references, she couldn't get another place without mine. She should have thought of that sooner.

Once she did give my name, on the off chance, no doubt, that it wouldn't be checked. But she was unlucky—an elderly woman and her daughter came to see me, and I gave Wendy a "reference" that sent them out of my house in no time at all.

After that, I didn't expect to hear any more out of *her*. In any case, I left Talgarth Road shortly afterwards and went home to Chester Terrace. I simply could not get another servant; besides, I couldn't bear the sight of Cyril a day longer.

All that was ages ago, of course. I live here in this poky little flat now—Tavistock Street, Bloomsbury—it's the best I can do on what Cyril allows me. After the blitz started, Mummy and I went to the country, a dismal hole in the Cotswolds. As soon as it was safe, I came back to London and stayed with Joyce. But that wasn't any good, either. Joyce had her house filled with people and was forever dashing off to a party or her war work. It all got on my nerves. She called me a rotten sport, we had a bang-up row, and I never see her any more. And of course I never see Cyril. He never really noticed I'd left him, I always said, though Daddy disagreed with me, making a good many uncalled-for remarks. Cyril went off at once to be a hero, and I don't know where he is now. The war suited him right down to the ground.

As soon as the peace came, I went off to live by myself. I prefer it to having the family around, always looking at me and asking questions.

So I go along from day to day. Mummy thinks I must be lonely—and it's a fact, I hardly see anyone now—but actually I'm not.

Yesterday, though, I had a visitor. Just at teatime the bell rang and I went to the door (I only have a charwoman, mornings, these days). A nice-looking young woman in a blue tailor-made and a good felt hat was standing there. "Mrs. Hunter?" she asked.

When we got into the better light, in the other room, I realized it was Wendy.

"Good Lord, I didn't know you!" I said. And no wonder, she'd changed so. She seemed taller, somehow, and she looked healthy and cheerful.

"I wasn't sure it was *you*, either," she said.

Well, of course, I have got terribly thin, and I have to wear a lot of rouge now. Mummy says I look haggard, but she always did fuss.

"Come to beg for a reference again, Wendy?" I asked her. "You're persistent, I'll say that for you."

"Oh, *no,* Mrs. Hunter," she answered. "I've been working in munitions all this while."

"One of the new war rich?"

"Nothing like that," she said. "It was just factory work, but it made me feel useful and I was ever so happy there. I'm going back to it when it's changed over for peacetime."

I couldn't think of anything to say to her, but she didn't seem to mind. "I came to ask you if you'd give me back my things," she said. "It's been a long time . . . so much has happened, and I'm sure you don't bear me a grudge any more."

"Really, that's an odd thing to say!" I said to her. "But it *has* been a long time—too long to expect anyone to look after your bits and pieces. As a matter of fact," I added, a sort of inspiration of the moment, "your box was lost when our house was bombed."

"I'm sorry about that. But perhaps I don't mind about my things as much as I thought," she said. "That's all in the past now."

"And you have a future?"

"After things are a bit more settled, like . . ." Wendy smiled, and I must admit she looked rather pretty. "I came for something else, as well," she went on. "I wonder—you see, I've thought about him so often—I wonder if I might see your baby?"

"My baby's dead."

She didn't say anything for a minute. Then she said, "How awful! I'm very sorry, madam."

I only wanted her to go. I couldn't stand it a moment longer, her looking at me like that, her eyes with tears in them and that soppy expression on her face. "At least my baby had a father," I heard myself saying.

She looked at me, and she looked round the bed-sitting room. I saw her looking at the single studio couch. "It didn't really make any difference, did it?" she said. I saw she was looking at me with pity .

"Go away," I said.

I noticed that I was still saying it—"Go away! Go away!"—after she'd left. I went over by the window and sat down. All I could see was the street with the shabby buildings and the gray dusk falling. I thought I would go out to the cinema, but it was too much trouble. After a while I went to bed.

# YOUNG HERBERT

by

Hugh Rockwell

The loading was finished and the vessel ready for sea, but they'd had to wait for the Old Man to die. The mate had gone ashore for a doctor, and the crew had gone ashore for one or both of two reasons. The sun was half an hour sunk, the *Pentland Sisters* swung quietly to anchor in the evening tide, and the Negro cook and the Negro donkeyman talked softly in the dusk.

The cook was sitting on his galley sill, and the donkeyman was sitting on the forecastle-head steps. Next the galley was the forecastle. There was someone snoring very loudly in the forecastle.

"That young Herbert sure can snore," the donkeyman said.

"Young Herbert's drunk," the cook said.

"He don't like this dyin' business none."

"You like this dyin' business?"

"Not much," the donkeyman said. "I don't like this dyin' business much at all."

The cook got up and leaned against the pinrail and broke his pipe on the forward chain plate. There was a bit of fire left in the bowl of his pipe, and this sizzled as it struck the water. The cook blew through his pipe several times, gazed earnestly shorewards, and sat down again, puffing from his slight exertion. He was a fat, little Negro with sideburns that came halfway down his cheeks, and he read himself to sleep every night from the Bible.

"Deaths at sea ain't nice," the donkeyman said.

"Deaths anywhere ain't nice," the cook said.

"Deaths at sea is wors'n all. Man dies on land, you call the undertaker an' done. If dead man yo' frien', you get drunk. If he ain't, you say that no-'count sonofabitch got his, an' you feel good an' go 'bout yo' business. Anyways, that ol' undertaker come. An' he gut dead man, an' he drain dead man, an' he stuff dead man. An' dead man lay in his coffin, lookin' gran'."

"Coffin ain't soft," the cook said. "O Lord, that coffin ain't soft."

"What dead man care for soft, fool? Dead man lay there, lookin' gran'. Then comes that lyin' line."

"That lyin' line," the cook said. "O Lord, that lyin' line."

"Dead man's wife come by. She leans over coffin, an' she brush dust from dead man's coat."

"She sees Willie's tie ain't straight. But she don't dare straighten it."

"She say: 'Willie was bes' husban' evah.' "

"But Willie say nothin'."

"She say: 'Willie was providin' man.' "

"Willie say nothin', Lord. Willie done."

"Willie's wife look down on Willie, an' she feel the stone on Willie's face, an' she know Willie sleep that night alone. An' she cry."

"Po' woman!"

"She cry cause Willie's sleepin' alone."

"But Willie's sleepin' on de lan'," the cook said. "Lan' sleepin' ain't sea sleepin'. Maybe Willie's berthed to his stahbod side, an' maybe Willie's brother berthed to his po't. Maybe Willie waken in de night, an' Willie's mother say: 'Hush, Willie. You wanna waken yo' bruthah?' "

"Dey don't waken."

"I ain't sayin' they do. I'm only sayin' lan' dyin' ain't sea dyin'. I'm sayin' that sea is deep and wide."

"An' you's sayin' right, George. Had Willie died to sea, his po' wife nevah see Willie no mo'. Nevah!"

"They've sewed Willie up in number double oo."

"Special Delivery, Lord."

"They sew Willie up. An' that las' stitch run through Willie's lips."

"Willie's signed fo' Fiddler's Green."

"There's a hundred-pound pig at Willie's feet."

"Willie's homeward boun'."

"Willie's on de rail."

"Old Man say 'amen.' "

"Willie's gone."

"I see them fish followin' Willie down."

"Willie's pickin' up speed."

"Willie's hull down."

"Everybody's stomach gone down with Willie. Cook, he have it easy for a couple days."

"Deaths at sea ain't nice," the donkeyman said.

"Deaths anywhere ain't nice," the cook said.

The cook sighed deeply and muttered several Biblical texts. The donkeyman stretched out a lean leg, so he could get a hand into his pants pocket. He pulled out a package of tobacco, and he rolled a cigarette. This is quite a feat, rolling a cigarette in the dark, but the donkeyman had yellow eyes, and maybe he could see good with them in the dark. The donkeyman was all mottled yellow and corded, and sometimes he chewed betel nut. His long, deft fingers worked well in the dark, making a cigarette.

"You hear that young Herbert snore?" the cook said.

"Young Herbert's a snorin' man," the donkeyman said. "Could young Herbert work like he snores, he draw three men's pay."

Some of young Herbert's snores would sound like a buzz saw cutting into hard wood and jamming. Then there would be a few pulpy, watery snores—then a creak of springs, delirious mutterings, and then the buzz saw again.

"Here comes Bos," the cook said.

"How you know it's Bos?"

"He always bumps into them spanker bitts," the cook said. "He can't never clear them spanker bitts. An' it sure ain't the Old Man."

"Hello, Bos," the donkeyman said.

"Hello, Chief," the bosun said. "Where's young Herbert?"

The bosun was thickset and Irish. The bosun was all jaw and Irish eloquence, and his features had been altered by many hands.

"Young Herbert's sleepin'," the cook said. "What you want with young Herbert, Bos?"

"The Old Man wants him," the bosun said. "The Old Man's nuts."

"You mean the Old Man's sprung?" the donkeyman said.

"That's too bad," the cook said.

"Yeah!" the bosun said, spitting carefully over the side. "Yeah, that's too damned bad. He's a mean, penny-rapin', back-scuttlin' sonofabitch—may fish drink his bile and his bones never rest!"

"You been drinkin', Bos," the cook said.

"You're damned right I been drinkin'," the bosun said. "That old scrog's drove me to drink. For Chrissake, I've been with him since eight bells, Chief. You wanna hear about that old goat, Chief? You know I'd as lief live in a limburger cheese as that hole of his, Chief? You know he ain't changed his sheets since we dropped Cape Henry, Chief? You know them cockroaches is gettin' big as bulls off'n his blood, an' he squashes 'em in his sheets and lets 'em lie? You ask me why I been drinkin', Chief?"

"That mate ain't in no hurry with that doctor," the cook said.

"That mate'll drown that doctor before he puts him aboard. You think the mate wants to cure the Old Man and kill a job? You think the mate's nuts, too, Chief?"

"An' the Old Man's askin' for young Herbert, Bos?" the cook said.

"He's bellerin' for young Herbert. You'd think young Herbert was the old screw's fag, to hear him rave."

"Easy, easy, Bos," the cook said. "The Old Man's hard-case, but he never took no back stairs."

"Did I ever say he took the back stairs of young Herbert? Did I ever say that, Doctor?"

"No," the cook said.

"But back stairs or no back stairs, he's the slimiest, meanest sonofabitch that ever walked in thin shoes, and I hope to the sweet Jesus before mornin' his toes turn up and his fingers down."

"You've been drinkin'."

"I've been drinkin'. Where's young Herbert?"

"Can't you hear young Herbert snore?"

"You think I can wake young Herbert?"

"You can try."

The bosun stepped into the forecastle. Young Herbert's thin length was sprawled in an upper bunk. One of young Herbert's hands and one of his feet dangled over the bunk board—young Herbert would never really fit into anything. In the forecastle's obscure light young Herbert's face looked pimpled and pasty. He had a loose-hanging nether lip and buck teeth, hardly an eyelash, and long blond hair. Several large cockroaches were minutely examining young Herbert's face.

"Young Herbert!" the bosun said.

The cockroaches scuttled into young Herbert's bosom.

"Sleeper, roll out!" the bosun said, and he shook young Herbert roughly by the shoulder.

Young Herbert's snore faltered, stalled, and picked up again.

There was a large pitcher of water on the table, and the bosun picked this up and flung the water into young Herbert's face.

"Whassa matter?" young Herbert said sleepily.

"He's sinkin'," the bosun said. "The Old Man's sinkin', and he wants you to stand by."

"That old cock can't even die without turnin' out the watch," young Herbert said, and his huge feet slapped as he hit the floor. "You wanna drink, Bos?" young Herbert said. He took a bottle from under his pillow, and he and the bosun each took a long drink. Young Herbert corked the bottle carefully and put it back. "Let's go," he said.

"What's the Old Man want me for?" young Herbert said as they skirted number-one hatch. "I hope to Christ he dies quick. I was havin' a wonderful dream. If he dies quick, maybe I can take up where I left off."

"You can't never take up where you left off with women," the bosun said. "Leavin' off gives 'em time to think up somethin' different."

"How'd you know I was dreamin' on a woman?" young Herbert said.

"You had a woman-dreamin' snore on you," the bosun said. "You was shiftin' into high when I wet you down."

"Ain't it the truth!" young Herbert said. "I was just fixin' to climb aboard."

They were in front of the captain's door. Young Herbert rapped gently with a freckled, grimy fist. They could hear a confused muttering on the other side of the door.

Young Herbert rapped again. "Captain!" he said.

"I want young Herbert," the captain said. His voice sounded funny, as if it weighed a ton and he was carrying it up a long stairs on his shoulders.

"This here's young Herbert."

"Come on in, young Herbert," the Old Man said in his heavy, weighted-down voice. "But don't you let that Goddam harp in. Don't you go for to let that dirty Irish scum in here, young Herbert." The heavy, angry voice ended in a burbling, throaty sob.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" young Herbert said.

"Shut the door," the Old Man said.

The room was very close. The Old Man thought sea air would give him arthritis, and so he always kept the ports of his cabin tight shut. This wouldn't have been so bad except that the Old Man thought water

was bad for the human body, and so he smelled like a flock of goats on a sunny day. The Old Man lay in a huge four-poster bed with a red canopy and curtains. The Old Man wasn't a pretty sight. He was big and fat and hairy and he lay naked on the top of his big bed, shining sweat all over. The sheets were gray with dirt and bloody where the roaches had been biting the Old Man.

"You see that moneybag on the desk?" the Old Man said.

"Yeah," young Herbert said.

"Take yourself a ten out of there," the Old Man said.

"What for?" young Herbert said.

"You're goin' to earn it," the Old Man said.

"How?"

"People should always get paid for watchin' people die," the Old Man said. "It ain't nice, watchin' people die."

Young Herbert opened the moneybag and took out a ten. He knotted the moneybag carefully and stuck the ten in his pocket.

"Come on over and sit down on the bed, young Herbert."

"Yes, sir," young Herbert said. He walked over and sat down gingerly on the foot of the bed. The sheets weren't so bad at the foot.

"I hope I didn't wake you up," the Old Man said. Herbert looked into the Old Man's eyes, and he had the same feeling you have when you expect someone to be home and he isn't home. They were the Old Man's eyes, all right, but the Old Man wasn't home.

"Young Herbert," the Old Man said, "I'm agoin' to die."

Young Herbert said nothing.

"Dyin' ain't nice," the Old Man said. "No one likes to die, young Herbert."

Young Herbert looked at the gray, bloodstained sheets, and wished he had the courage to open a port.

"You could tell me I've lived long enough to die, and you could tell me I'd be happier dead, and you could tell me dyin' 's best," the Old Man said, "but it wouldn't make no Goddam difference. I don't want to die."

Young Herbert felt embarrassed.

"That's why I sent for you, young Herbert. I don't want to die. But if I got to, I got to. But anyways, I don't want to die alone. If there was a woman aboard, I'd have her in here, so's I wouldn't die lonely. There ain't no woman, so I want you."

Young Herbert looked apprehensive.

"Don't worry," the Old Man said, carrying his ton of voice up the end-

less stairs. "Don't worry. I don't want you to do nothin' wrong. With a woman, it might be different—with a man, it makes you lonelier than ever."

A shudder passed over the Old Man, and he leaned back on his pillows, closing his eyes. Young Herbert didn't want to look at the Old Man, but he couldn't help it. The sweat was running down his immense body in rivulets, and the coarse, dark hair which covered most of his body was wet and soft. Where the cockroaches had been feeding were soft, red blotches.

"The next one will carry me off, young Herbert," the Old Man said.

"The next one?"

"Yeah. The next time I feel my heart gettin' bigger and bigger and tryin' to come out through my ribs. I can't stand another. Dyin' ain't no fun, young Herbert."

"I guess not," young Herbert said.

"You ever worked on a farm?" the Old Man said.

"I was brung up on one," young Herbert said.

"So was I," the Old Man said. "Tell me about your farm."

"Tell you about it?"

"Yeah. Did you have a brook on your farm?"

"Sure. A farm without a brook ain't good for much."

"There was fish in the brook?" the Old Man said anxiously.

"Yeah."

"The brook was cool in summer," the Old Man said.

"Yeah."

"And when you'd been hayin' all mornin', you'd come down to the brook at noon. The hay lot slanted towards the brook, and there was willows."

"Yeah," young Herbert said. "Them willows was cool."

"You remember how them corn shocks looked on them October nights, young Herbert?"

"Yeah," young Herbert said. "They was shining like them silver slippers the girls wear at Rio, and the moonshine come up misted all around."

"How was it when it snowed, young Herbert?"

"It was white and soft," young Herbert said. "And when you come down for the mornin' milkin' there wasn't no tracks in the snow. It was beginnin' new, with no tracks in the snow."

"No tracks in the snow," the Old Man said. He lay back on his gray,

bloodstained pillows and the sweat ran down the grooves of his belly in little hairy rivulets.

"How was it in spring, young Herbert?" the Old Man said, and he was carrying his ton of voice up the endless stairs again, breathing hard.

"In spring?" young Herbert said dreamily. "Well, I'll tell you how," he said, "I'll tell you how it was in spring. In spring the ice would get rotten an' by-an'-by the snow would go and one mornin' the wind would haul 'round to the sutherd and the old man would say: 'Herbert, you better overhaul the plowin' gear.' I'd be settin' by the wagon shed, maybe, settin' by the wagon shed in the sun, and the old man would say: 'Herbert, you better overhaul the plowin' gear.' "

"And you felt so good you threw your shoe at the old cat layin' there in the sun," the Old Man said. "You took off your shoe and threw it at the old cat. You felt so good you could feel the sap start in your shoes and tingle all the way to your ears."

"That was the first thing the old man would say," young Herbert said. "Then I'd overhaul the gear, and perhaps a week later or two weeks later the old man would say one mornin': 'Well, Herbert, I guess you can start on that south corner today.' And we'd heave the plow in the wagon and start out."

"Yeah," the Old Man said eagerly, "yeah, young Herbert."

"An' when I got to the south corner I'd wrassle the plow out and make her fast. And ole Betsy would start powerful slow."

"How'd you feel when that share bit in, young Herbert?"

"Good," young Herbert said. "I don't know how it was, but I felt good. I felt I was goin' to plow every Goddam foot of earth in the world."

"Betsy had been layin' up all winter," the Old Man said. "She'd start slow. She'd grunt and heave and stop to look at the crows flyin' over the place where they'd buried her mother that winter."

"How'd you know that?" young Herbert said, aghast.

"I just knew it," the Old Man said. "And then Betsy'd start to sweat and the share would bite in and tremble and the earth would come off the share in a thick brown wave. You got your eye on somethin', young Herbert? The first furrow's the one."

"I got my eye on that church steeple," young Herbert said. "I got her lined up good."

"Does she pull hard?" the Old Man said. He sat up excitedly.

"Not too hard," young Herbert said. "The south corner's broke good."

"Can you hold her down, young Herbert?" the Old Man said.

"I never seen the plow I couldn't hold down," young Herbert said.

"Let me take her, boy," the Old Man said. He got off the bed and stood bent-kneed, his hands on the handles of his plow, and he slouched his shoulders to ease the reins a little. The Old Man didn't see young Herbert at all now—his eyes were on the distant church steeple and he was making as straight a furrow as he could.

"Easy, Betsy," the Old Man said. "Easy, girl. Easy, old hoss." And he plowed back and forth across the cabin floor, his eyes on that distant steeple, his huge shoulders straining to keep the share in the ground.

And when he came to the end of his furrow and was helping Betsy swing the plow around, he straightened up suddenly, saying, "Jesus Christ, I'll never make it today!"—and then he pitched forward on his face.

Young Herbert sat on the edge of the bed, looking at the Old Man lying on his belly, with his arms flung out, and young Herbert could almost see the reins loose across his back and under his armpits, and young Herbert could almost hear Betsy paw the ground and whinny, impatient to be off again.

"Christ Almighty!" young Herbert said.

There was a tremendous banging at the door.

"Young Herbert!" the bosun shouted. "You all right?"

Young Herbert didn't answer, and the bosun opened the door and came in. "I thought the old sonofabitch had killed you," the bosun said. "What was all the noise about?"

"We was plowin'," young Herbert said.

"You was what?"

"Plowin'," young Herbert said.

"Oh," the bosun said. "You was plowin'. Lend a hand."

Together they dragged the Old Man's fat, sweaty carcass to the bed and manhandled it up and on top. The Old Man's eyes were open and his false teeth were half out of his mouth and he still smelled like a flock of goats on a sunny day.

"We'll bury him in the mornin'," the bosun said. "We'll bury him ashore. At least we don't have no sewin' to worry about."

"I'm goin' ashore right now," young Herbert said. "I'm agoin' to get drunk."

"You and me both," the bosun said.

They shut the door softly, and went on deck. They walked forward,

and the cook and the donkeyman were still there, talking in their old, wise, seamen's voices.

"He's gone," the bosun said.

"God rest his soul," the donkeyman said.

"It ain't likely," the bosun said.

"I suppose you boys is goin' ashore?" the cook said.

"Yeah," the bosun said. "We'll take the dory."

They walked over to the dory. The cook and young Herbert manned the forward davit and the donkeyman and the bosun manned the after davit. They raised the dory until it was a few inches above the rail.

"Fast all," the bosun said.

They swung the dory outboard. The bosun got into the dory and then young Herbert got in, and the cook and the donkeyman stood by the falls.

"You look a little shaky, young Herbert," the donkeyman said.

"I am shaky," young Herbert said. "I'm shaky as hell."

"Deaths at sea ain't nice," the donkeyman said.

"Deaths anywhere ain't nice," the cook said.

"Lower away," the bosun said, and the falls slipped softly round the pins.

# TWO POEMS

by

A. M. Krich

## *THE SHAMEFUL MUSEUM*

*O, let the eyeball lose its way,*
*Turn aside or turn away,*
*Or like a sweating waiter turns*
*A tablecloth to hide a stain.*
*Turn inside out and look upon itself;*
*Enormous mirror where pity*
*Finds its haggard face.*

Out of the subway's needle eye
The rush-hour people thread,
Spreading paper tales of murder
Against the rain that spills
From phantom bomb bays overhead.
And some with twisted fate,
The face is of a special kind,
Broken by breaks they did not get,
Scold the street
(As though God's rain
Was made to make them wet)
On which their feet
Get lost, trip and stumble
To some nostalgic nowhere
Hidden in the mind.

For them the magnet is a place
Where no one minds an extra face,
And words and music scrape
Like a soothing finger in the ear.

In movie dark they feel their way,
Like blindmen tapping out forgotten scenes,
To wormy whale mouth, the balcony
Where schoolboy Jonahs in lonely teens,
Spend their sunless day.
And though they know it isn't fair,
Compare between annoying hats
And lovers' heads, the famous
Bosom, bicep, or interior
Decoration to their own.

Too soon, too soon,
Too soon, this innocence
Is snatched away,
Like a razor from a baby's hand.
The eyes and ears of the world
Are fastened on catastrophe;
Death by accident and plan.

A naked man hangs from a steeple
Nearer to heaven than a bell.
A mountain of bones, a certain people,
Tell a story no one can tell.
Some nervous person groans;
For him the flickering agony is real.
He feels the sting of unthrown stones,
While children crawling under seats
Inhale the heavy air of yesterday
Like canaries in a mine.

*Up periscope! Up evil eye!*
*That incandescent Edison,*
*Who put his master's voice into a box,*
*By paradox the fox pursues the hound;*
*Now the deaf inventor*
*Makes the human actor*

*Love and laugh without a sound.*
*With uncanny presentiment he presents*
*A fable of Icarus in irony.*
*An American eagle, whose wings we see*
*Are pulled by strings,*
*Soars off with a baby in its claws.*
*To shoot?*
*Or not to shoot? That is the question!*
*In this dilemma there begins on celluloid,*
*An art that makes all others null and void.*
*To capture life itself, to hold it still,*
*As in a pawnshop window, you will find,*
*A hundred watches stopped at the anxious hour.*

## *THE MAN IN THE OYXGEN TENT*

*for Paul G. 1917-1943*

*"Red Rover, Red Rover,*
*Let someone come over . . ."*

How penetrate unless to gnaw
The hollow bone of a life's mistake?
Sinking teeth into the flaw,
Eating the heart that will not break.
Before we knew just what it meant,
Our wildest wish was dragged to tame accomplishment.
The fever chart decides it is too late,
Dishonest even to suspect
Random chance turns into fate.
Each error grows in retrospect.

O, it hurts to see anything go!
Think of the sadness of an echo . . .
I weep for my comrade—he is dead!
I would if I could put ashes on my head.
We soften every blow with rites and dreams.
For even the skin, they say, which seems
Our surest property falls off

A little every day like dandruff.
Or if someone prefers a stronger simile,
Like a cursed and unseen leprosy.

Should I apologize before I start
This small lament that gags my throat?
Knowing that death like blame looks for its goat,
I am so wrapped up in the part
The I, that in the looking glass is me,
Is not the usual person I usually see.
I cannot tell or tear myself apart—
Tangled strings of ego bind
Tighter than a knot the mind
Of the individual on his counterpart.

Some dream of pity they cannot know—
Bite the hand that beats them.
Some hide the hate they cannot show—
Kiss the hand that cheats them.
False, false, our faces and our wives!
We borrow voices from other lives
Reaching, as they say, into thin air
To find the ordinary emotion in the rare.

As human bullet shot into a net
In an amusement park
Describes ballistic arc,
Bounds and rebounds from the net,
In nightmare sweat I wake
Within a flying dream to break
Holy earth between familiar tombs,
Shake with mourners in unmirrored rooms.

History in this sense is personal
And private, yet as common to us all
As the pants we put on in the morning.
Ah, we think, the dawn
Of a new day is dawning.
And with a yawn
We step into the same old shoes,
Breakfast with the same old news.

A world on fire boils oceans
As for a cup of tea; we see
The history of the human family
Melt like lump sugar. Are our emotions—
What is left of them—so feeble?
The flame throwers in the synagogue
Turn to ash the dusty Gog
And Magog of the Jews . . .
At this point for them, O chosen people,
What little choice there is to choose.

The moths fly from the covenant
Brain themselves against the armored host.
The fever that devoured a continent
Seizes the people it needed most.

Was there wailing at your funeral?
And thirteen mourners, mourning's numeral?
Those sad songs,
Forgotten by most of us,
Those rights and wrongs,
Forgotten by most of us,
Those sad songs belong to us.
Sing them and be stoned!

Remember the sound of the whip
That cracked like lightning in the pale!
Remember the passport and the ship
Over whose steerage rail
Our parents groaned
And vomited their way from Europe's jail.

In us, intellect's impatient hate
Paced the pulse of the ailing state.
So of its collapse we spoke
More often than our own. The joke,
Of course, was on us. O never mourn!
The wish is always there to be reborn,
To clear the very painful atmosphere
Which filled your jellied lungs at birth.
Still there, dear friend, around the global earth.

# TWO POEMS

by

Byron Vazakas

## *AN EVENING AT HOME*

A lonely dog is barking on the
mud flats where evening clinks
like a rat among the broken
bottles and the metal scrap.

A distant door slams; a train
shrills; and the baseball
diamond is abandoned to the
Coca-Cola sign. Shrinking

From the sick distrust of light,
the negative dark descends
with something more than
shadows, ambivalent as love,

Angry, yet fearful for presuming
anger. . . . Night flatters my
huddled heart, like blackness
flame, as a home to which it

Urgently returns. Behind me the
emphatic housetops scratch a
scrambled heaven with indignities.
The deserted field deploys the

Cast-off comforts of companionship.
But debris is a comfort, too,
and the dog's mad howl a refuge.
Like a camera focused, the

Pattern of this place takes shape,
as one calculates a nudity;
and darkness becomes something
one has always known.

## *THUNDERSTORM*

Even the buildings seem to liquefy;
and the horizon, wrinkled with
rain, befogs commercial pinnacles.
A hustle of light flows through

The gutters. The sewers accept a
ration of debris. . . . Not relief so
much as an escape, the summer
shower clears, like holidays,

The downtown street of people huddled
beneath a drugstore's dripping
canopies. Here conflict overflows
the caution of environment. The

Water gathers, clings, then spills from
sagging awnings and old-fashioned
cornices. I take my place within
this weather, endangered as these

Drops, in the poised position of merely
looking on. Darkness slates the
warm, wet pavement where I watch
the water rippled with unrest

Discover crevices, decline diversions
of smooth surfaces. What if the
storm should never cease? Yet a
way could still be found from the

Fantasy of unreality to the greater
fantasy of fact. The street is
punctuated by the rain's persistent
exclamation. The storm possesses

Posts, whispers like silk, anoints all
obstacles, creeps batlike down the
sides of walls. A draft exhales interior
breaths, cool mold of bookstores,

And the scent of women. A waver of wind
whips up the water. A breeze brings
freshness and failing thunder. The
rain is a music watched by silences.

# TWO POEMS

by

Harold Norse

## *OF MEMORY, THE STRONGBOX*

Of memory, the strongbox
where slides of action filed away
layers of chagrin collect
the heart could never dust, gainsay

—we still prefer no projection
where the slide bleeds like a mouth
beaten and purple; the voices rise
from childhood like whips; remember the street

where your friends, jibing, mocked

those lewd duets that broadcast from
your shameless, wounded parents' strife;
and you had bled and fled; that scene
is ice, is frozen hard within the box

whose key you sought to lose, but you it lost
where fiercely you would hurl it
down some boiling vortex of negation;
and you were hurled instead—the abyss

is deepest where memory would forget.

## *STREET SCENE*

Unconserved by angels, interest or
rules of being, those fumbling adolescents
awkwardly neck in the stone shadows
at the entrance to the power plant.

Their laughter, prurient as their fingers, twists
ultimates, all they misunderstand—
the choked rose saddening the ruined street
guilty and abandoned as their future.

And still the civic charts and smiles,
the fronded parks, the playgrounds
insult them; they are not goals
to those weak, empty faces:

that lift and swear (signaled by my heels)
and grin like dirty, cunning elves of evil;
nimbly as rabbits discard their crude embraces,
staining the dull air with grave dishonor.

# ODE TO A FASHION BAZAAR

by

Jane Mayhall

Hail to you, oh beauteous magazine!
    Unfolding but perfection all within
unravished pages, each a fetching virgin
    reflecting nothing gross nor sad nor human;
you wear your soul as lightly as a gown.

Ideality is fashioned here in print,
    without the living cloth, the thread and taint
of those we know who dress in naked want,
    misshapen in their mortal discontent.
Your seam and line disguise their ugly bent.

Oh, empty head with coiffure fixed in gold,
    you never think of those whom fortune failed,
you never think a thought, nor grievous hold
    revengeful passion in your curly mold.
Oh, sterile smile, regale a somber world!

Oh, silken knee and girdle at the waist,
    Eternal Youth within that dummy breast,
oh, diamond-draped from throat to ivory wrist,
    so suave and sleek and mindless of our worst,
showing all your riches as the best,

forgive! Our taste is bad, is even bitter,
    we do not know which style would suit us better,
nor who is right, or good, whose life is greater.

Oh, model nose and cheek of rosy powder
can you erase our pain and earthly pallor?

Can you, can you, oh beauteous magazine,
with beauty's barren pose, with pure disdain,
like scented soap, oh solvent, wash us clean
and rectify the errors of our skin?
Oh, attitude of health and moderation!

Oh, altitude of wealth, bring us perfection,
cut us up to fit your last edition,
oh mode, oh vogue, oh velvet-trimmed ideal,
bring lace, bring linen, let your dress conceal
this shape of self, this world, so poorly real!

# LAST MAN ON A ROCK

by

Ralph Peterson

The burning sun moved stealthily into the shelter and sat on his face until the dreams he was having were gone up in a sudden puff of smoke as he sat up and brought his head into the cool shadow again. He sat still for a moment, his back aching; he looked around at the hut, at the flood of sunlight, and then got up wearily to wait for night and its more reasonable temperatures.

He took three sips from the canteen, running the brackish rain water through his teeth in the vain attempt of cleaning them a little, and then —as he always prefaced each day—went to the door, stooped out, and walked to the top of the rock.

Then he turned slowly, looking at the pale circle of the blue sea. It was unmarred; the entire oval lay serene and vacant. He went back to the hut. He took down his pencil from the tin can, and put down another black mark on the wall. He always put the mark there in the morning, yielding to the prodding fear that he might go crazy from the heat by night and thus forget to put down so much as one mark. Then he would never again know the day, or the month, or the year—nor could he tie to the outside world his existence here by remembering holidays, Sundays, anniversaries, birthdays, events in his own life—to say nothing of Christmas.

Now, he stood in the door of the hut again and looked out at the water as it yellowed in the rising sun.

"Pacific," he said, going through his morning prayer and commentary and news report as he always did, "Pacific . . . damn you, Pacific."

In an obscure room of an anonymous building at CinCPOA (Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas) an unnamed clerk moved to a single filing cabinet in the long row that leered at him every day and marched across his face every tortured night. It was the same morning, and he took out a bunch of cards.

"Bert, we got a few more coming up. Get out the gab machine."

Bert punched his desk expertly, and the typewriter came up, licking its mechanical chops. He inserted a card and waited for his chief to read off the names. Flies were charging in through a broken screen.

His chief hefted the stack of cards and guessed at their number, checked his estimate, then started reading the names:

"Johnson, Edward Trumball . . . Seaman First . . ."

Bert typed down the name, the staccato barking of the machine hitting the sultry air like a hammer. Then he dropped the shift lock and added:

MISSING SINCE APRIL 1. MISSING, MUST BE PRESUMED DEAD.

The two typewriter sailors with their paper sea had lunch later, and when the mashed potatoes were settling uncomfortably in his sweaty body, Bert took the cards and the duplicate list over to Communications and started the long machinery that was going to set into motion a whole fleet of paper boats, one sheet of which was going to turn yellow via the offices of Western Union, get put into an envelope, get pedaled down the street by a war-drafted and aged telegram "boy" in Akron, Ohio, and get deposited in the hands of a woman who would be standing afraid in the door of a little frame shack in the mill district with a service star in her window, and her name would be Johnson, too.

The war was very far away from the jeep carrier that was lying discreetly in the lee of the Marshall Islands on a shakedown cruise that same morning, quite a distance from a sun-baked rock, alone in a sun-cluttered sea, and even farther from CinCPOA. A morning patrol was due to go up, though the Japanese fleet was leagues out of sight in green channels in the Philippines where white and yellow men quarreled violently over the questionable privilege of enduring life on Leyte. And Leyte was 2000 miles away.

Lieutenant (jg) Fowler was restless. The war had moved next door, and he wanted to change residence with it. He sat in the ready room with the two pilots who were accompanying him on the warless strike and listened with disinterest to the weather department beating its

Colgate chops. He turned to Lieutenant (jg) Sudchek when it was over and the sound of accumulating motors indicated that the elevator was bringing their Hellcats topside.

"I can't figure out who the devil picked out a hunk of sea like this. It's like reading blank paper." Lieutenant (jg) Sudchek agreed forcibly, and with Ensign Traulbaugh they pulled on their flight jackets and started the long journey up to the air, down the long corridors that succeeded each endless stair.

On deck, Lieutenant (jg) Fowler looked out at the sea.

"There must be something else we can do with our lives," he said.

A few minutes later, the three planes charged wildly out into the blue yonder, and Lieutenant (jg) Fowler was watching their three shadows moving laughingly and with subtle mockery on the water beneath them.

He socked the intercom.

"Sudchek?"

"Yeah, Al. . . ."

"Look at all that water. . . ."

"Hell of a big ocean. . . ."

"Probably barracuda in it, too."

"Must be."

Ensign Traulbaugh timidly made a contribution:

"Nice morning, isn't it, sir?"

"You're frigging right it isn't."

Ensign Traulbaugh quit making for the promotion.

On the rock, baking slowly in the sun despite the framework of driftwood and old canvas and utterly useless contraceptives, *Johnson—Edward Trumball, Seaman First,* went over his list again. He had listed the girls alphabetically, recording each name with the tenderness of the man who feels that he will never see a woman again.

Months ago, he had forgotten about the broken radio and particularly the broken transmitter. He had even forgotten the inventory of the 10-in-1 rations in back of the hut. He had forgotten the faces of the LST crew that had accompanied his being left on the rock. He was plain rock-happy, and a particular kind of rock-happy, because he was all alone.

*Now, Juanita—for example—now there was a girl!* He made a conciliatory check against the name and proceeded with his thinking about her. He thought about how she looked in the daylight, then varied that

nostalgic theme by thinking how equally swell she looked at night. *Now, Juanita—now there was a girl!*

The crew of the LST that had deposited *Johnson—Edward Trumball, Seaman First,* on his lonely rock stirred uneasily at the richly populated bottom of the Coral Sea. Consciences were full. A report hadn't been made, either orally or in duplicate. Nor even the Navy way.

"Hey," gurgled the captain, his death-green face heaving back and forth under the sea, "what about Johnson?"

"We'll bite," chorused the crew, glorying in total and restless oblivion. "What about Johnson?"

One of the clerks in CinCPOA woke with a terrific headache. He had suddenly remembered, in the pathless thickets of his nightmare, something he had dropped from a filing cabinet months before—a card that had something to do with someone named Johnson somewhere.

In Akron, Ohio, the noiseless bugles blew. They blew over the fumes from the factories, and *Johnson—Edward Trumball, Seaman First,* was laid to mortal rest in Forest Bottoms Cemetery *in absentia.* The weather was warm, the humidity high, and it looked like a hot summer. The insurance checks were already included in the Johnson family plans for financing the future, not because the Johnson family was particularly ghoulish, but because any Johnson family in any Akron living life through any time clock needs dough, and needs it bad.

A girl named Sally across the street was not invited to the funeral, but because no one in the Johnson family knew about her and *Johnson—Edward Trumball, Seaman First,* she had to sit alone and cry it out.

*Johnson—Edward Trumball, Seaman First,* was working on his afternoon routine. He was counting to one hundred, using his fingers and toes and the ten laboriously matched rocks he had neatly placed before him. The damned sun was battering his island with gigantic fists for exercise, and even the island ached for a little green foliage and rest. Even a rock gets tired of lying there and taking all that punishment.

He took out his notebook and moved down from Juanita to Loraine. *Now, Loraine, there was a girl!* Whatever her last name, and he couldn't remember it now, she was a real girl. As he put the notebook away again and felt, rather than saw, farther down on the list the warm and misty

neon light that would spell S-a-l-l-y all too soon, he thought that now he couldn't even blame Loraine for the USO mentality. He danced a waltz and two fox trots with her on the burning rocks. *But, Loraine, now there was a girl!*

Charged with superhorsepower, Lieutenants (jg) Fowler and Sudchek and Ensign Traulbaugh ravaged the Pacific afternoon with careless sticks and spread out in staccato rhythm several minor appropriations' worth of Navy fuel behind them. The laughing shadows on the water ran along in obedience, occasionally stopping to toss on a wave and howl at the sunlight. The planes charged on, noisily combining their three horsepowers in an articulated equine search for land or danger or something.

Sudchek got lonely this time. He hit the key on his radio and asked for Lieutenant (jg) Fowler and waited for Al to come out of the receiver neatly riveted above the dashboard.

"Hello, Sud, empty today, isn't it?"

"Yeah!"

". . . maybe it was yesterday . . ."

"Think we'll win the war?"

"Not if the marines get there first."

"I think we got a bunch of islands." Sud left the transmitter open and leaned from the cockpit and studied the black spots on the horizon. They reached out toward the three speeding planes, and presently the first rocky violation of sea passed under them.

"Let's count 'em."

Fowler—Lieutenant (jg) Fowler, that is—blatted an affirmative reply into the mike, and the planes turned over and around and up and reversed themselves while Fowler neatly registered the total count on a pad clipped to his flightboard:

EIGHT ISLANDS, COMPRISED MOSTLY OF:

A. Six islands with Lucky Strike Green that had to be overseas someplace.
B. Two rocks, gender uncertain.
C. One sea gull in search of a mate.

The three Hellcats consulted the maternal jeep carrier and set course for another fifty miles of patrolling as the neglected little group of islands backed up to the horizon behind them and slid over into the sea, frustrated and wondering.

Then it was Fowler's turn again. He turned on the radio nervously as he studied a strictly localized area of ocean. Left over from the archipelago, it was a good-sized rock, with a neat little atoll marking its location, and when it got beneath him, he whistled hard.

"Hey, Sud, there's a guy on that there rock!"

"Where?" Fifty rods astern, Lieutenant (jg) Sudchek had a long and involved consultation with his eyesight.

And as if anyone within twenty feet of his Hellcat could possibly see his finger, particularly at 210 m.p.h., Lieutenant (jg) Fowler stuck his finger at the rock.

A man stood there, waving.

CinCPOA was undergoing a shake-up. A lot of guys were being transferred to guns—all but the braid, that is—and among them was a specific *able* seaman who had one last job pestering him before he ran off into the Philippines to die in a Luzon gully. He went to the hut and reached down between the filing cases and took up a card about a weather assignment. His successor looked at it, and raised hell, not about poor Johnson, but mainly because his predecessor had been so careless about dirtying the floor.

At the Servicemen's Center in Chicago, a girl named Loraine danced carelessly with a marine, and mentally catalogued the servicemen with whom she had danced these long and uncompetitive years. The night was smooth, the music was good, and everywhere she looked were medals and service ribbons and stripes and braid, all enclosing neat parcels of men.

The big Dumbo moved clumsily back and forth in the wallow of the waves, while its crew trotted back and forth on the pier, waiting for a new pickup assignment. There was a lot of Pacific for so little land.

The Lieutenant (jg) who did such things rushed up with an assignment derived jointly from the radio and a jeep carrier in the Marshalls.

The crew mounted the Catalina and the Catalina roared off down the water and sucked up some sea as it hit the air.

*Johnson—Edward Trumball, Seaman First,* waved at the three planes because he always waved at the albatross when it went overhead and because he had once read *The Ancient Mariner.* Then he went back to counting things to keep his mind on a regulated level.

It was almost dusk—*here comes the wonderful and cool night*—when

he heard big motors assaulting the twilight. He heard the Dumbo charge along overhead, felt the heads of the crew twist in question as the eyes in them ransacked the darkness for his rock, and then he closed his eyes as he heard the sound lower slowly, and then—the impact of unwilling wave against willing metal.

He opened his eyes. There was no question about it. He heard the lapping of water against a rubber boat as the night pulled itself carefully over his stretch of sea.

*Johnson—Edward Trumball, Seaman First,* straightened his blouse, rubbed the dust from his forgotten stripe, and waited for the boat to hit the rock. When it got there, a CPO heading the crew asked, the bottle of beer in his extended hand:

"Long time?"

*Johnson—Edward Trumball, Seaman First,* marched erect into the boat. *The American Legion was marching down the street in Akron, Ohio. The colors were waving, and the fearless gray heads of the successful legionnaires strode along in front of him. He was in the middle, the failures in Akron life who had also carried guns somewhere walked along behind him without voice. The popcorn was going down the mouths of the people who cheered along the right-of-way, and some men just sat in beer parlors hunched over beer, and looked out at the parade with him there like a jewel in the middle of it all, and refused to get up—because their brass pigeons were heavy. The flag went by them and ignored their lack of fidelity in a blaze of patriotism, being quite inanimate and very flaggy. Seaman First Edward Trumball Johnson (resurrected, discharged) lifted his legs like perfect pistons and set them in neat right-left order on the pavement. . . .*

But all that was tomorrow; now the rock sat in terrible isolation and listened to the rubber boat rubber away and wondered if there would ever be another war and another mislaid seaman with a broken radio. . . .

Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal put on his reading glasses against the anchors of Navy Day and, inspired by the martial music behind him, peered for a moment at the expectant audience and launched into his previously-released-for-publication speech:

"Fellow Americans . . . and Shipbuilder's Union Local No. 138 (CIO) . . . I welcome you to this observance of a sacred day in the American calendar . . . the day in which we honor the memory of men

like John Paul Jones and Admiral Farragut who damned the torpedoes straight ahead, and I can't help thinking—in dedicating LST 1732 of the Navy—of the men in Navy blue who fought so hard and so long and so thanklessly in the Navy's hemisphere of this war—the Pacific. . . ."

The boys in the LST at the bottom of the Coral Sea went back to sleep, relieved of their load of conscience. Lieutenant (jg) Fowler got ready for another take-off into a Japless morning, and Sud was grouchy. A girl named Sally across the street from a family named Johnson in a town named Akron, Ohio, picked up the same paper the Johnsons had, and there it was: *my guy's come back.*

*Johnson—Edward Trumball, Seaman First,* met up with V-J Day and joined the men at the beer parlors who refused to get up for parades. They were long parades.

# HOMESICK FOR A HANGING

by

James Cox

"RILEY?"

The field was long flat white in the sun.

"Riley?"

At its edges the pines were black.

"Why don't you come in the house?"

She stood to the sun side of him. Her shadow covered him. She leaned over.

"It don't do no good setting out here looking at it."

She touched his shoulder.

"You been setting here in this hot sun all day."

She withdrew her hand. Her broad back lifted slowly, as she rose, erect.

"Riley?" she whispered.

She turned. She walked between the rows of drought-stunted tobacco. Her shadow dragged slowly in the dust behind her. She entered the back of the house at the end of the field.

She took hold of the chair by the stove and dragged it to the center of the room. She sat down.

The children turned from the window and watched her. Carol and Little Louise moved away from the window. Bingham turned back, looked out at the field. Carol stepped across the room, singing:

*Oh, I got 'em in the bottom of my rambling shoes,*
*Got 'em freight-train blu-ues. . . .*

"Shut up, Carol."

Little Louise followed her.

*Got 'em in the bottom of my rambling sho-oes . .*

"Little Louise!"

"Let the girls sing, Bertha," said the woman who came into the door from the hall. "It's a good thing somebody can sing around here. I let 'em sing for me all the time, don't I, Carol? Only they ought to sing sacred songs."

Bingham turned from the window and looked at her. He turned back.

Bertha stretched out the apron across her lap. It had large faded lettering at the bottom. She looked up. "Louise, will you go to the store for me? See if Mr. Hawkins will let you have a little fatback and a sack of flour," she said, "and take the girls with you."

"Why do you always put it off on me?"

"And a box of cinnamon."

"Cinnamon?"

At the window, Bingham smiled.

"Yes."

"All right. All right. Here, Carol, Honey, fix your hair. No. Let me. Take Little Louise's hand. We're going to the store."

The sound of the singing grew faint in the hall.

*The rumbling of a freight was my lullaby,*
*A wildcat whistle taught me how to cry,*
*Oh, I got 'em freight-train blu-ues. . . .*

"Bingham?"

"Yes'm?"

"Is he still setting there?"

"Yes'm."

"Come here, Bingham, son."

They hurried down the field toward him.

"I know I oughtn't to bother him. But, Bingham, I just can't leave him to set out here in the hot sun this way. I just can't. Come along, son. I ain't never seen him take nothing so hard. It's enough, I know, a month and a half without no rain. But just setting there looking at it. Maybe he'll listen to you. Come along, son. Oh, Bingham, why don't it rain?"

They slowed. She took the boy's arm. She whispered, "Now, Bing-

ham, don't say nothing to cross him." They approached and stood over him, quietly.

"Riley?"

The boy walked around in front of him.

"Bingham's here, Riley."

"Papa?"

"Ain't you going to talk to Bingham, Riley?"

"Papa, we been watching you——"

"No! Bingham." The woman shook her head.

"But, Mamma?" the boy sobbed. He stooped down in front of the man. "Papa, don't set out here. Don't set out here no more, Papa. Don't! Papa——"

The man leaped to his feet. The boy grabbed his arm. He shoved the boy aside. The boy fell, crying. He brushed past the woman, strode toward the house.

"Papa!"

He stepped into a row of the tobacco, trampling the plants. He crossed to another, trampling.

"Papa, you're stepping on it!"

The boy ran, crying, after him.

"Don't, Papa!"

"Riley," the woman called, "don't do that!"

Riley stumbled, sprawled onto the ground, leaped to his feet, ran headlong for the house.

"Bingham! Let him go. Come back, Bingham. He's all right."

She hurried after the boy.

"Wait for me, Bingham."

The boy ran back to her, throwing his arms tight about her waist.

"He's all right now, son. Don't cry."

She put her arm around his shoulders. They walked heavily.

"Look at me, son."

She didn't see the man reappear in the door, aiming against the side.

"Look at me, son."

The sound of the shot crowded upon her as the boy crumpled from her arms that were bleeding when the next shot was. She fell.

The gun clattered onto the white-packed clay outside and slid. The man leaped from the doorway, with frantic explosionlike strides crossed the back yard, and was into the field, running toward a tail of pines slung

from a low ridge beyond the field. The gun struck a stone in the yard. It snapped open, ejecting the two empty shells. The woman and the two children appeared in the doorway. From the shells cockeyed on the ground smoke snaked idly. The woman's face, motionless, whitened: like a piece of a cardboard box left in the rain and sun. Her lips moved, whispering, "I'll declare. I'll declare."

—Me how to cry. Me how to cry. Me how to cry. Me how to cry. *Don't Papa!—*

A high skinny cloud lowered a shadow onto the clustered pine trees at the field edge. They were motionless and dark with the shadow and dead interlaced lower branches, snapping noisily as the man plunged through them to a clearing: and paused. Stillness flared momentarily. The man breathed hoarsely. A branch end snapped off and left suspended in the path behind dropped and caught, scraping on a lower branch. The man sprang forward. Stopped. Turned. The end disengaging itself, fell quietly to the ground.

—Nothing. Nothing but a broke twig. There Louise and the kids in the field. Ain't coming after me. Out at Bertha and Bingham. They ain't done nothing yet. I got to get my breath.—

Against a pine the man leaned with forearms interlocked, head bowed onto the arms: like a limb stripped from the tree. The bark on the trunk was thick-scaled. Each scale was made of thin pages packed tight, their edges rough and black so that the scales were dark-rimmed but smooth and pale brown on the surface. The man lifted his left foot and placed it closer to the tree. Did the same with the other foot. And again with the left foot. The soles of his shoes slipped on the slick needles underneath.

—Sit down. Sit down. Why don't you sit down?

*why don't you come in the house*

I was setting there thinking I was talking to Sheriff Cupp. Standing over me she was. But, Sheriff, I said, I didn't want to kill her. Why don't you tell the truth, Riley? he said. You did kill her and your son too. Don't hand me that shit you didn't want to kill her.

*riley*

But I tell you I didn't want to. That was what I didn't want to do all the time. Can't you understand? That was what I didn't want to do all the time. So you buys a box of shells from Hawkins for no reason at all, and leaves a loaded gun around the house just in case you changed your mind, I reckon.

*it don't do no good setting out here looking at it*

I didn't pay no attention to her. Standing over me. Good God in heaven. Setting there pretending I was talking to the sheriff before I even killed her. Before. Good God in heaven. But that's what I didn't want to do, Sheriff. I loaded the gun to kill that hound bitch what comes to the house. But she wouldn't let me.

*riley*

Riley, why did you buy the shells in the first place? I don't know. You don't know! Don't hand me that shit.

*you been setting here in the hot sun all day*

She was running me wild. If she'd only knowed what I was setting there thinking. Before. If I'd only told her. But I didn't know myself. I didn't want to kill her. But in a way I'd already done it. She left then. The shadow just pulled away off me. Well, Riley, he said, it don't make much difference. Either way you're guilty in the eyes of the law. I reckon so, I said, Sheriff. But I didn't want to if you can understand that.

*bingham's here riley*

She come back, Bingham with her.

*ain't you going to talk to bingham riley*

Now, Riley, Sheriff Cupp said, don't keep saying that. You didn't want to. It don't make sense.

*papa we been watching you*

But I had to. I guess that's all there is to it, Sheriff. Bingham. Why couldn't they leave me alone? You had to! Now you're making sense. Why? Why did you have to, Riley Reed?

*papa don't set out here don't set out here no more papa don't papa—*

A scream flamed from the man's throat. It stopped. The man stood still. A ripple in the thin white shirt across the back fell, overlapped the broad belt at the waist where it tucked loosely into faded denims. The man turned. From black close-set eyes flat cheeks over cheekbones hung heavy jaws. The eyes lifted, swayed at the field. He lunged through the trees against the brittle branches, cracking off, scraping, forking as a heavy one pinned his neck and bent without breaking. It stopped him. He covered his face with his arms, backed off. Moved forward slow. Two branches tonglike gouged into his stomach, into his shoulder. He wrestled them. He settled back onto his knees, stretched forward onto the ground, whimpering.

—I don't hear nothing. They ain't coming. Can't break a Goddamn. They ain't dead. The branches ain't dead. I wouldn't shot her if the gun wasn't loaded. Knot sticking me in the belly. I wouldn't thought about

it when I run in the kitchen. I wouldn't. I wasn't never going to kill them, thinking about killing myself. Last week I swore I wasn't going to kill them. Only ones. I wouldn't. I wouldn't, thought about it when I run in the kitchen. Setting there in the corner. Sun on the barrels. If I hadn't knowed it was loaded. I'll take care of that bitch. Yesterday. I said. Then I loaded it to kill the bitch what come to the house full with pups laying around all day. Don't kill it, Riley, she said. If I killed that bitch never would killed Bertha and Bingham. When I run in the kitchen if there wasn't no shells in it. Sun on it. Laying around waiting to dump her pups off she was. Bingham would wanted one. I started to kill it. Don't kill it, Riley, she said. I just run it off and come back. Supper was waiting. And set it in the corner. Loaded. And I didn't think nothing about it being loaded. And set down to supper. What was that?—

The man lifted his head from the ground, cocked, like a lizard listening.

—Nothing. No. Posse. That's Henderson's bell.—

The man got to his feet. Crouched. Charged. At the edge of the clearing a shred torn from his shirt hung on a branch, uncertainly, as the heavy steps of Henderson's bell stalked the countryside . . . CLAWN . . . CLAWN . . . CLAWN . . . like a spider the shred slid down on a single thread: and hung there.

—Will they get CLAWN the bloodhounds CLAWN from Wilsonville like when CLAWN the nigger broke in Hawkins' store CLAWN CLAWN CLAWN creek bed?—

The man came out of the pines. The creek bed was naked. Dried and white like a dead snake flattened belly up on the road it zigzagged down from the hills. A thin stream at the mud marrow seeped along from one shallow pond to the next. He hurtled brush at the bed edge. Crossed the baked clay and rocks. Turned upstream splashing through the shallow ponds and the mud.

—Meet at Henderson's. Milling around like a bunch of blind dogs in a meathouse. Butting their guns into everything. Yelling over that f—king bell all they gonna do. They'll do shit. CLAWN till they get enough CLAWN they'll CLAWN aw shit CLAWN shit CLAWN enough and then they'll set out. CLAWN CLAWN CLAWN Ben Markham yelling at me how that nigger ought to be strung up by his balls. Mister Benjamin Markham. The son of a bitch. Me how to cry. Me how to cry.—

The bell stopped. The man stopped. Mud clouds swirled in the water about his shoes, spread, then cleared as the man stood: listening.

—If I could make the highway. Catch a ride to Raleigh. Durham. Or just take it to the road. Get out and go right on down through the pines to the house. Lay up outside till they come in tonight then backtrack this trail and lay up around here till things quiet down. They'd follow this trail to the highway and think I'd got a ride and went on. But nobody'd pick me up. It wouldn't do no good to get to the highway unless I got a ride. Just a short ride to the road and throw them off. But they ain't going to have the dogs tonight. Not this quick. But I got to hide. That's all. They ain't going to have the dogs tonight. I got to hide.—

Leaving wet splotches on the wide clay flakes of the creek bed, the man crossed quickly to the bank. Caught hold of the brush, pulled himself onto the bank: and ran. Ducking a low branch, straightening, leaped a gully: jolt-landing, running light-footed over firm loam in a hickory grove, into a clearing with stacked chestnut, across the truck-road wading brush at its edge to a bridge, sinking, of leaves, awkwardly lifting legs high, onto firm loam again, skirted a fallen trunk: and fell.

—A shoe of pain. Leaf stuck through with a crooked twig. Leaf veins. By my head. Not far to the rock. They wouldn't climb it. Me how to cry.—

His foot caught by a forked root off the trunk twisted free, as the man rolled, and pushed himself off the ground. Stepped, awkwardly, with the foot, hobbled: quickened into a run again. Leaned to the steepening slope, he cut away from the creek valley into a rock-filled ravine hung on the hillside like a waterfall from the ridge crest, where a massive chimney rock jutted out over the treetops. The man spidered upward, over and around the boulders. Reaching the base of the chimney rock, he stretched out his arm supporting himself against a tree trunk leaned back and looked up at the dark, overhanging chin of the rock. He turned. Made his way around to the base of the rock on the upper side. Advanced to the rock. Searched. And tucked his fingers into a high crevice, straining pulled himself up, groped with his feet for support below. Kicked at the rock. Taut, his arms gave way, straightened: and the man dropped to the ground. Leaned back, panting. Looked up. Turned, embraced a tree beside the rock, and shimmied up with convulsive grips of arms and legs. He pulled himself onto a limb. Straddled it, resting. Looked over to the rock. Climbed through the limbs, higher. Swung out

on a limb by his arms. Lifted his legs, setting himself in motion like a pendulum. His feet struck the rock above a slight ledge. They struck again. He edged his grip farther out on the bending limb. Swung carefully: let go. His feet came down on the ledge. The limb sprang free, the leaves of its outer branches brushing upward against the rock. The man's body followed through. His face smacked hard against the rock. His hands found uneven edges and held. Blood came out of his nose onto his chin and clothes. On the rock a jerky rivulet of it ran down, puddling on the ledge. Above the rock was ragged and slanting to the crown. He scrambled up quickly. At the base of the crown he circled, found a low side: and drew himself onto the top. It was saucerlike, pockmarked with weather. In the shallow bowl was black dirt with tufts of stiff colorless grass. A scrawny cedar rooted in a deep crack leaned out over the edge. The man crawled to the bowl and lay down. Above the hills, red-eyed like an animal, the sun stared. Was veiled. And rolled beneath the ridges.

—God in heaven. Breathlike. Radio music. Bursting to stop. Stop or quiet down. Sakes. My nose is stopped. Dark soon. They'll never look up here tonight. They won't see the blood on the rock. It's too high. Almost up to the branches. Unless it run down. Shit. Get caught now. What's the use? Water.—

The man edged to the rim of the rock on his belly and looked down the valley. Spanning the ridge, the creek valley, and the next ridge a long line of lights like a bridge at night moved forward slowly. The man ducked and crawled back to the bowl.

—Floating. Hold on. Broncho chip in a flood. Under the bridge. Coming. After me. O God. After me. They'll get me. They'll know. They'll see the blood. They'll get me. Riley Reed come down from there. Closing in. All them lights. But they can't see me up here. Hey, Sheriff! Hey, Cupp, we found him. He's up here on the rock. Sheriff Cupp. Markham. Hawkins. Efird. Caldwell. Mr. Henderson. Vaughn. Wooten. Come down from there, you worthless murdering son of a bitch. Markham. Christ, he'd shoot. He'd shoot. He'd love to shoot. Fall down that side. O God, O good God in heaven, don't let 'em get me. Please, God, don't let 'em. Please, God! Markham doesn't know. Please, God. Holding my insides.—

The man scrambled to the edge. Hung down. Thrashed wildly with his feet for the ledge he had used coming up. Let go in panic haste with his hands. His sprained foot lodged. Gave way. He falling backwards

doubled quickly, slid bouncing down the towering slanted jagged rock.

—Hoo o o o seawith scalp lockswagging whitelyy y y ybe belo o o o oold!—

Caught a projecting: and hung. He moaned.

—Cracked white plaster. On the. Morning wall. In bed. In shoulder face warm. Bertha. Dream. Bertha.—

Scrambling upward again, the man reached the crown and pulled himself, face pressed to the rock face in the strain, sobbing: onto the saucer top. Crawled to the tufts of colorless grass, and circled like a dog, and lay down.

—Arm over Bertha's shoulder hand full gripping with her heavy breast. Bertha, just had a dream. Bertha, are you awake? Yes, Riley. I had a dream. Don't tell it before breakfast, Riley, it might come true. No, it couldn't. It couldn't, Bertha. I dreamed I'd shot somebody. And run up the creek hollow. A posse was after me, Bertha. Markham and Cupp and Mr. Henderson: the whole county. I climbed the rock. I climbed the rock. And it was dark. I could see the lights of the posse, hundreds of them. Coming up the ridge. They all come to the rock. It was bright as day. Ben Markham was yelling for me to come down. His face was mean. He wanted to kill me. I could see it in his face. He swore he was going to string me up by my balls. And then I was falling. You know how you fall in a dream, slowlike. Right down to 'em, and I couldn't find anything to hold onto. Then it was the sea I was falling down to with waves like that scalplock Prebble has, you seen it, ain't you? Millions of 'em waving on the water. And then I guess I woke up. Bertha? Turn around, Bertha. Riley, baby. Bertha.—

A beam of light sliced through the sky, leaned to the rock. Another followed.

"Bertha!" the man whispered, pushing himself up, half sitting, wild-eying the lights. Voices came from below. "O God in heaven. It is. It is."

He crouched motionless. The lights circled the sides of the rock, jerked, veered off crazily through the darkness.

"Come a man to do a thing like that is more than I can understand."

"Dunno, Ben, his crop was ruined for one thing."

"Whose ain't ruined? A man would do a thing like that ought to be strung up by his balls."

"You don't reckon he climbed the rock, do you?"

"Riley Reed? Climb that?"

"Look around anyway, Markham."

"I think he went on to the highway. All this possum hunting about the woods is useless as teats on a boar hog if you want my opinion. You know he'd know better'n hang around here."

"Never can tell, Ben, these crazy bastards can outsmart you."

"Shit. These tenants ain't got sense to pour piss out of a boot with directions wrote on the heel. I always said Henderson had the poorest lot of tenants in Wilson County."

"Well, I don't see nothing."

"You won't see nothing. The police'll pick him up in Durham or Raleigh tomorrow." The light beams went back together, side by side, like the headlights of an automobile, and passed on down the ridge.

—The son of a bitch. The dirty son of a bitch. What does he know about tobacco? Henderson's got the poorest land in Wilson County, too. But no, he don't take that into account. If I had a good piece of land. Of my own. I'd show these bastards how to raise tobacco. Strung up by his balls. Everybody ought to be strung up by his balls according to him. See him in trouble once. Never sticks his nose outside of that store of his. But loves to go on a posse and talk about all he's going to do. Till he's walked a couple of miles, then he wants to go in. It's useless as teats on a boar hog then. That's Mr. Benjamin Markham with his hardware store. I'd tell him. Had a piece of land. Green. Three foot high. You got a good crop here, Mr. Reed. Yep, it's right fair. I hear first grade will bring a good price this year. Yep, that's what they told me. Who told you, Mr. Reed? Them two American Tobacco men was down here last week. You talked to them, huh? Yep, Markham, they wanted to know where I was going to market it. Where are you going to market it, Mr. Reed? Well, Markham, I don't know as I'd be willing to say, just off-hand. Sure. Sure, I understand, Mr. Reed: just wondering, you know. Well, give my regards to Mrs. Reed. All right, Markham, I'll mention as how you sent your regards. Do that. Do that, Mr. Reed. I'll be much obliged. She's a mighty fine lady. Mrs. Markham was just saying the other day what a fine lady Mrs. Reed was and how well thought of, you know, she is in the community. Fine as they come, Markham, fine as they come.

"And she laying there dead!"

Fell over Bingham on the ground with the blood. O good God in heaven. I ought to be shot. Myself's the one ought to be shot. Talking like that. And her dead. O God. Mr. Reed. Shit.

"Mr. Reed."

The things I used to tell Bertha. And she'd say, yes, we'll do that sometime, Riley. She knowed we wouldn't. Wouldn't do nothing. Ever. But set in that shack of Henderson's and dry rot. And talk. To her and Bingham. What else to do was there but what I done? What else? Bertha ain't suffering now. Nor Bingham neither. And he won't grow up to take shit from the Hendersons and Markhams and Caldwells all his life. Maybe he would've left. Gone away and stayed away and made a good living somewhere. Like I should've if I had any guts. One night away from home and I come tear-assing back like a sick calf. Don't know why. I wanted to after that. But never could leave. Won't brought up to nothing but share-cropping. And dry summers. Dry summers. All I ever seen was dry summers. Next year. Always next year. Mr. Reed. Shit. Pretending I'm going away tomorrow. Waiting here till they go in. Then going away. I know I ain't. Knew it when I come up here. Set a spell and think. Mr. Reed. And come morning I'll go down and let 'em take me. I know. I'd get homesick. Christ. Homesick for the place you killed your wife. Homesick for a hanging. That's what it amounts to. All my life I been homesick for a hanging. Knew there wasn't any use. Cigarettes?—

The cackle of cellophane and dig and sputtering of wet matches was loud. One barked into light. On the rock by the man's knees a crumpled package of Marvels glistened, a mashed cigarette protruding from the rathole in the bottom. Dark hands closed around the flame. The man's face appeared above the cupped glow. Frowning, took away a bright bud in a curtain of smoke. And the glow in the hands disappeared. The bud arched down close to the grass, brightening and fading, brightening and fading.

—That woman in Durham started me doing that. Ever since I was a kid. Sixteen then. Opening my cigarettes from the bottom. Met her at that roadhouse on the Greensboro road. Couldn't get no ride and come inside for a bottle of beer. Her bottle was empty. Elbows on the table. She was pinching around the hole in the bottom of her cigarettes. Braver'n a pig in the trough I orders two. The guy looked at me hard and set 'em on the counter. I carried 'em over. Your bottle's empty, I said. Damn if it ain't, Honey, set down. You live around here? she asked me first thing. I ain't never seen you around, she said. Naw, I said, I left home. I live in Wilson County. Left home? Aw, Honey, what'd you do that for? Don't like my old man. Don't like farming somebody else's land. Don't like nothing. Now ain't that a way for a kid your age to talk. Look here, I

said, you tore the bottom out'n your cigarettes. Yeah, she said, I always do that. But you got some more in there. You don't catch on quick, do you, Honey? she said. What you mean? Oh, I see, I said, you open 'em from the bottom. That's right, she said, been doing it for years. I'll be damned. Let's go in town, Honey. I know a nice place in town where we can dance. I don't know, I said, I ain't got much money. I got money, she said. Well, if she had it she didn't spend none of it. Spent all mine though. She made me promise to open my cigarettes from the bottom. From now on, she said, so if I ever come in a place and see a package tore out at the bottom I'll know you been there, Honey. Shacked up with her. First woman I ever stayed with all night. And the next morning got up and come straight back home. Homesick. The old man beat the shit out of me when he found out I'd got the clap. Me how to cry. A wildcat whistle taught me how to cry . . . born in Dixie in bloomberry shack . . . Lordy Lordy Lordy got 'em freight-train blu-ues. . . .—

The heavy gray sky faded, lifting off the dark ridges. Knotted into white clouds: and was blue. Red sun bulged, spread, yellowing the low clouds over the green ridges. The man stirred.

—*You're stepping on it papa*

Bingham? Bingham woke me up. Running. Trampling. Dark in the kitchen with glint on the barrels. In the field holding Bingham. I never heard the first shell. She never saw. She never saw. It's morning. I'm cold.—

He turned over on his side, brought out the cigarettes and matches from his pocket, and lit one, put the cigarettes and matches back in his pocket: and lay down, eying the sky.

—Cigarette tastes like blood. They'll take you to Wilsonville. Have an inquest there, I reckon. I'm glad Bertha won't know. Never know. Louise, she'll be there. Witness. Yessir, I saw him do it with my own eyes. I and the children, they're his children, you know, poor things, was coming in the front door. We was just in time to see him shoot from right there in the kitchen. In the back of the house, you understand. There's a hallway runs. Your hand is laying on your shirt, holding onto it with two fingers. Look at it.—

A breeze like a large bird dipped its wing and glided past the rock and crossed the ridge. Motionlessly, a thin-leaf elm on the crest shed leaves.

—A shoe of pain. Leaves come off mighty easy. Foot looks twisted.

With black dirt stuck to the shoe. Like dampness mold. From scuffling in this dirt up here. Got moist. Tree didn't stir. Leaves just let go.—

The man sat up.

—The ankle ain't broke I know. Feels like a bulldozer run over it.—

He unfastened his shoe. Another breeze passed the rock and eased over the ridge. A bevy of leaves loosed from the tree settled to the ground in its wake.

—Never would thought to find grass growing up here. Just falling. Settling. Like they ain't got nothing else to do. Funniest I ever seen a tree shed leaves.—

The man took off his shoe and put it between his knees and drew the lacing out while looking at the tree. He put the shoe back on his foot.

—I should've took the creek path in the first place. You don't think when you're scared. Lay by a little thing that ain't nearly so important. Them leaves. And think you're being smart. To see another breeze come by like them first two.—

He sat and watched the tree, which stood a little below the ridge crest, dry, close-woven in the brimming blue sky.

—The way they was falling.—

"Like me." The man said aloud.

—Ain't got nothing else to do.—

"You never was really any 'count."

—Talking to yourself now. Setting up here talking to yourself out loud.—

"And waiting for a breeze to blow to see leaves come off a tree."

—A shoe of pain. Talking both ways. I mean I'm talking and you're talking. Sakes. I should've took the creek path. Talking to. About yourself talking to yourself. Tree talking to the leaves.—

"Tree talking to the leaves," he whispered.

He bowed his head. He nudged at his eyes. And drew his hand away and looked at the knuckle.

"*I* didn't kill Bertha," he said aloud. "I wish them leaves would fall like that again."

—The leaves are like everything.—

"Things just *are*."

The man looked up. And twisted around and looked up. He turned back around and ducked his head. Wiped his eyes with the back of his hand again. He looked at the tree.

"And I just am," he whispered. "Like the tree."

—Without even stirring: the leaves can go.—

The man stood up. Stretched his arms. Head back. Relaxed his arms, and dropped them.

"I'm thirsty," he said.

He reached in his pocket for his cigarettes. Fished the last from the crumpled package. And dropping the package, put the cigarette to his mouth. Struck a match. And leaned down to it, smiling. He went to the edge and lowered himself over it. Made his way slowly down the rock backwards, down through the branches of the tree that touched the rock. Faced around, his back against the rock: and leaped. Caught a limb. Climbed through to the trunk. Shimmied down to the ground. Took the cigarette from his mouth and dropped it and stepped on it. He turned and went around the base of the rock, down the ravine rock-fall, and came out at the creek. He hopped down into the bed on one foot, and crossed over to the small stream trickling over gravel. Lowered himself onto his hands and knees: drank for several minutes. He got up, and hobbled back, and sat on the creek bank by a clump of brush.

"Water was good."

He put his hand to his mouth. And with the palm wiped the water from his mouth and the end of his nose. The hand paused. His eyes lifted. The end of his nose edged slowly from under his hand, and straightened. He lifted his head, leaving the hand cupped, motionless, below. His lips parted. Closed. And smiled gently. He wiped his chin and dropped his hand onto his knee.

Two men came down the path by the creek bed. One of them was slapping a flashlight against his leg as he walked. The other carried a gun. They were walking head down, silently, except for the leather gristle of their footsteps, the scrape of the brush along the path, and the slap of the flashlight. They passed.

He got to his feet. He stepped through the brush into the path.

"You looking for me, Sheriff Cupp?" he called.

They whirled. The slap of the flashlight stopped abruptly. It fired a bright spot of sunlight as Doc Sitwell pointed it quickly at Riley. Sheriff Cupp raised his gun. They advanced slowly. And then Riley caught the tiny reflection of himself growing larger in the round face of the flashlight fixed on him, uselessly in the bright clear morning. He smiled.

# WATER FRONT

by

Wayne Ellson

It was that still damp coldness. There was no wind. Gray clouds hung over the water front, and below them the gulls sailed forever, their cries falling faintly back to the earth.

On the pier the big gray ship was waiting to go out again, but there were days of loading ahead.

The scow was due with the cargo for number-two hatch, but the tug hadn't brought her in yet. Number-two hatch was idle. The day had almost gone already, and the men were tired and cold.

The men looked at Angelo, the hatch boss. No one said anything. No one had to say anything.

"All right, you bandits, take a smoke," Angelo said. "That scow will be here any minute, so nobody get lost unless you want to go back on relief."

The men went to the ship's messroom and sat down and lit cigarettes. Their faces were red raw from the cold, furrowed with weariness. More than anything else in the world they wanted to go home. They wanted to go home and yet they knew that they couldn't. Even at the overtime rate of a dollar eighty-seven an hour they still wanted to go home.

"That miserable bastard!" Nick said. He was a young hawk-nosed fellow. "Did you hear him? Big-shot Angelo. He's a politician now. He don't know nothing and never will. The nearest he ever was to the water front before was Coney Island and he talks big to us all of a sudden because somebody gave him a job."

The others looked at Nick. Nick had been drinking; they all knew it.

"Take it easy," Joe said. "He's the boss, so what can you do about it?"

"The boss? He ain't my boss," Nick said. "He couldn't shine my shoes. What can he tell me about loading a ship? What can he tell any of us? I spit on him."

"He calls us geeps. All the time it's geeps. Hey, geep, he says to me. What's this geep business?" the Kid said. The Kid was a short powerful bull-necked man of forty-five whose face had been punched into a mess of pulp in a hundred battles in the ring years before. The Kid could move like a young fellow yet, but something had gone beyond his face. Too many punches in the head had crossed some wires in his brain.

"Let him geep me and see what happens," Nick said. "I want to hear him say it to my face alone."

Joe had poked the Kid. "Shut your puss!" he said. "Don't get him going when he's full of wine."

"Don't get who going?" the Kid said.

Joe pushed the Kid's head and said, "Shut up!"

Nick glared at the blank gray bulkhead.

Tony, a short slight man of sixty, puffed on his pipe and observed the others. His skin was very brown and drawn so tightly over his face that his face was skull-like. He seemed sickly and weak, but this was a lie. He was strong and knew how to conserve his strength. He never said much, and the others were hardly ever aware of his presence. Now he knew the trouble was coming. It was always like this. Talk, talk, talk. It always began that way, and then something happened.

For a moment he forgot where he was. After the war, he thought, I will go away from here. I will buy the farm. Have chickens, goats, raise the tomatoes, pepper, eggplant. After the war it will be good. It will be quiet. I will put my hands into the warm earth again like in the old country. The hands in the earth is better than anything, in the warm earth.

Joe wanted to change the feeling of antagonism among the men. He was always like that because he couldn't work well when there was bad feeling in a gang. "Say, did you hear about Dom?" he said. "He's a very smart fellow. Didn't he tell you he knows everything? Sure, he knows everything about nothing. Very smart guy."

Dom raised his black eyes. There was no expression on his round face. He raised his hand slowly and put his cigarette in his mouth.

"What did he do, help build the Brooklyn Bridge now?" Frankie said.

The others were smiling.

Dom exhaled smoke through his nostrils. There was no change of expression in his face. He kept watching Joe.

"Listen to this," Joe said. "He's driving the car for Angelo last night. He's got to bring it for Angelo. He's going along and then the car stops on him. He can't get it going. The great mechanic gets out and has a look and figures the car's frozen—and it's just been running. So he gets some hot water and he dumps it on. You know what happens then? You know how cold it was last night. He really froze the car then, and he has to call up Angelo. Angelo asked what happened, and he told him. It was good he told him on the telephone. Angelo was going to kill him."

Everyone laughed but Nick and Dom.

"It was froze," Dom said.

Joe waved his hand. "Go on, you geep, you couldn't drive a mountain goat through a barn door."

"Don't worry, I know cars," Dom said. "I owned six of them. I took them all apart."

"Go on, where you come from all they got is goats."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. You got your citizenship papers?"

"I was born here!"

"Born here? You come over with a boatload of goats and geeps. You still got the hairs on you and the smell."

"You think you're a wise guy."

"Well, you think you're a mechanic," Joe said. "Anybody can think. It's a free country. Everything free. That's what they told you, didn't they? Free beer, free air, everything for free, and even on Saturday night a nice little piece of pasta for free. No?"

Dom smiled. "That's one thing that ain't free in this country," he said.

"You pay?" Joe said. "And you told us you don't pay."

"You pay different here," Dom said. "Worse. Sometimes I think it's cheaper to get married. Free? Sure, this one I got now, she don't ask for money. Only eight bucks last night for the hotel room. Five slugs for the bottle. A buck for the bellboy. We ate in a rathouse before we went up to the room. That was another three and a half, and then I just got her in a corner when somebody knocks on the door. I thought it was the bellboy again and I took the bottle with me. I was going to belt him in the mouth with it, and it's the house dick. You know what he says? He says this is a respectable hotel. Well, who the hell said it wasn't? I said to him. Then he says we got to get out. Get out of my

eardrums, I says to myself. I knew what he was after, so I shove five bucks in his hand and tell him to go to Florida. Then he says, We don't do that. This is a respectable house. I stuck another five in his mitt then and he took it. Grabbed it like a sea gull. For five bucks it was a scratch house. For five bucks more I made it respectable."

The others laughed. Even Nick smiled.

Dom let the smoke come out of his nostrils slowly. His face was the same as before. His black eyes were the same.

Angelo appeared in the doorway of the messroom then and everyone looked up. Joe started to pull his gloves on.

"All right, stay where you are," Angelo said. "You ain't in any hurry." He lit a cigarette. Nick was looking right at him, but he didn't meet Nick's eyes. Finally Nick turned away.

"How about that scow?" Joe said. "Is she going to come in?"

"Getting anxious, Joe?" Angelo said. "It's cold out."

"We want to go home sometime tonight," the Kid said, "that's all."

"You want to go home?" Angelo said. "When do you ever go home, you bastard?"

"I mean I want to screw out of here," the Kid said. "What's the matter, you think I want to buy this ship?"

"Why, you dumb geep bastard, you're drawing a buck eighty-seven an hour sitting on that four-cornered ass of yours instead of losing a week's pay in a crap game at Mike's and getting sick on guinea red, and you've got the nerve to complain to me."

"You know what you can do with the money," the Kid said, "don't you? I've made money, real money."

"Yeah, in the ring. I know, but you ain't going to make it any more," Angelo said. "You couldn't box oranges any more."

The Kid stared at Angelo. His fists tightened up, but he couldn't answer. All he could do was move his lips.

"We're putting in a lot of time, Angelo," Joe said, quietly, "too much time. Work and sleep. Work and sleep. That's all. Sure, we draw plenty, but that's not so good. In the end the doctor gets the money, maybe the undertaker. Who knows? Too many hours is no good. I don't see my wife even. Just say hello and good-by."

"Don't worry about your wife," Angelo said. "Somebody'll take care of her while you're winning the war down here."

Joe flashed an angry look at Angelo but didn't say anything.

Angelo stepped into the messroom then. "I just wanted to let you

boys know that they're throwing a little party for O'Brien," he said. "O'Brien's going away. So dig up four dollars."

"How much is that apiece?" the Kid said.

"Apiece? Why, you dumb . . . That's four bucks a man on the line. So get it up. Everybody."

"If it's to bury that no-good Irish pig I'll put ten on the line," the Kid said.

"What do you mean, get it up?" Nick said. "Who's O'Brien all of a sudden, Jesus Christ? What's he to us? What did he ever do for us?"

"That's the word from the office," Angelo said. "They want four bucks from every man."

"Three bucks yesterday for flowers," the Kid said. "Two the day before for Thompson."

"And a buck and a half tomorrow to buy birdseed for the elephant in the zoo," Nick said.

Angelo spoke very quietly. He didn't look at Nick, but his words were directed at him. "That's the word from the office," he said. "They want the money and everybody's name. There ain't no law says you got to give the money, but if you don't, don't be surprised if you find yourself on the breadline in the morning."

"Yeah? Well, tell the office I wouldn't give that ball-buster four drops of sweat off my pratt if he was dying of thirst," Nick said. "Tell them I said so!"

Angelo dropped his cigarette and ground it out. His face was black with anger. "Four bucks," he said, without looking at Nick. "That means everybody, unless you're tired of working for a living." With that he turned around and went out of the messroom.

The longshoremen looked at each other.

"That slimy corkscrew," Nick said. "Did you hear him? He's the bigshot now. He's the boss, so he asks for money for O'Brien. Money for that vomit. He's playing in with the big boys now. He's a politician."

Joe had a worried frown on his face. "Who wants to throw in four bucks?" he said. "But it's four bucks or they'll knock you off. They can do it. You got to play ball with them."

"Play ball with who? What'd they ever do for us? Who are they?"

"They've got the say," Joe said. "Like Mussolini. They say breathe and we breathe. They say take down your pants, we take down the pants. They give it to us and we take it. We even smile. We make believe we like it."

Little Tony knocked the ashes out of his pipe and looked at the others and nodded his head. He was anxious to get back to work, even though he was tired. It was always better to work. Talk made trouble. Talk always started it. He nodded his head again. His back was hurting him because he'd relaxed. He could feel something pulling like a wire. Closing his eyes, he tried to forget about the pain. He thought about home. Then of the farm—the farm he had wanted ever since he had come to America. After the war. He could feel the warm earth in his hands. He saw it before him with the life of the sun in it. The farm would be hard work, but not like this here. There would be peace and quiet, not this gut-tearing ceaseless noise and fighting. There would be quiet in the earth, his earth—after the war.

In the slip a tug tooted. The men stirred.

"Here comes the hearse now," the Kid said.

The men began to button up slowly.

"This is going to be big stuff," Nick said. "I want to see Angelo andle it."

"We'll do all the handling," Joe said. "It ain't his sweat."

"Yeah, but he's going to tell us how to do it. He's the boss."

Angelo appeared in the doorway again. "Come on, off your cans! What do you want to do, sail with the ship? For Christ's sake, I give you a break for a smoke and you want to swallow the whole arm."

Cigarettes were dropped and stamped out. The men got up quickly, all but Nick, who took a last puff and then let his cigarette drop from between his fingers. He ground it out slowly and deliberately.

Angelo watched him. "What do you want, a special invitation?" he said. "Maybe you want me to jump in for you?"

Nick got up and pulled the peak of his cap down. "Listen," he said, "I longshored before you ever saw the water front, so don't think you can put my shoes on, because you can't, see? All you have to do is talk, but don't think you're loading the ship or that you know how. We just let you talk, but we're loading this ship because we know how. See? We don't need your phony orders."

"Come on, get going!" Angelo said.

The men went out and back to the hatch. The scow had been brought to the side of the ship and made fast. The tug was pulling away again.

The hatch gang started down the ladder into the hold. But Nick took his time. He went over to the side of the ship and looked down; then he turned to Angelo and said, "This is big stuff all right." And he smiled

in a way Angelo didn't like. Then he followed the others down the ladder.

The winchmen were ready. Some of the longshoremen were down on the scow now. A spotlight was focused on the scow. The winch began to roll finally. The cable came down, and the longshoremen on the big cases aboard the scow grabbed the slings with gloved hands and adjusted them to one of the cases.

The winch started to roll again. The steel cable tightened. The big case began to come up slowly, creaking, crackling as if it were going to come apart. The cables were biting into the wood; pieces of wood flicked off. The tremendous weight hung like a threat above the scow. The cable seemed as if it were about to go. Below, the men on the scow stood back and away, looking up, watching, their gloved hands on their hips.

No one spoke. The winch rolled slowly, straining. The winchman watched Angelo's hand signaling. Angelo was leaning over the side of the ship, guiding the big case up.

The case came into view abovedeck, then higher. Angelo dropped his hand, and the winch stopped. The big case hung still. Angelo moved his hand again, and the other winchman, Rosario, moved his lever. The case came over slowly, over the deck of the ship and then over the open hatch, and hung still once more.

With his eyes, Angelo measured the case and the mouth of the hatch. The case was too big to be dropped squarely in.

While Angelo hesitated, a voice came up from below. It was Nick. "Come on!" he yelled. "Start moving them cases. We're not growing any younger down here. Corner the case. That's the only way she'll come down."

Angelo looked down. A big vein stood out on his forehead. "Who's giving orders down there?"

"Who do you think?" Nick shouted back.

"Well, I'm running this! What I say goes around here. When I say something moves it moves."

"Only it don't work that way all the time," Nick said.

Angelo then heard the Kid laugh down below. He knew the others were laughing too, and he wanted to do something. He wanted to stop them from laughing at him.

"Come on, corner that case and let it come!" Nick said again. "We want to be home for Christmas."

Angelo had no answer. The big vein on his forehead looked as if it were about to burst.

"You got to tip that case too," Nick said, "if you want to get it down here. That means a brace. Did you put a brace on it? You don't want that case to crash if the cable slips."

"You want to go home and you want a brace. Maybe you want some strawberry ice cream down there too?" Angelo said.

"Sure, right through the bottom of the ship," Nick said. "Where'd you learn to longshore, in a *pizzeria?*"

The Kid was grinning up. "He used to work in a spaghetti joint on Mulberry Street!" he shouted.

In a fury Angelo signaled to the winchman to lower the case.

"You don't have to lower that if you don't want to!" Nick shouted. "He ain't got it set right."

Angelo looked across the open hatch at Rosario and Frankie, who were hesitating.

"You dogs of whores, move! Move your bowels before I leave you to stand on the corner tomorrow. Move before the mother of your family starves to death with her loved ones!"

"God talks with a big mouth!" the Kid shouted up from the hold.

Rosario's and Frankie's faces were tense. The big case was beginning to drop very slowly.

"Out of the way below, filth! Scum of the earth!" Angelo yelled down.

When the big case began to drop the men below pulled back out of sight. Cornered, it went through the open hatch slowly, perfectly, while Angelo signaled with his hand, guiding its way. Once the case had dropped below the hatch opening, Angelo increased the movements of his hand. Rosario and Frankie let the case drop faster but not too fast. Then Angelo stopped his hand. The winch ceased working, quieted. The cable held. Rosario and Frankie never took their eyes from Angelo's hand.

There was a shout from below.

"Ready?" Angelo shouted.

"Wait!"

"Wait? Is some son of a bitch of a mother's son to have a baby down there? Does somebody want to make a speech?"

"Hold your bananas!" Nick shouted back. "There's a roller out of place!"

"Well, put it back, or must I shove it up your hairy tails?"

The Kid was already under the case. He shoved the roller into position and got out from under the case.

Angelo was watching. He moved his hand, signaled. Rosario and Frankie started the winches again. The big case went down slowly. Angelo made a final gesture with his hand, as if cutting an invisible thread. There was both finality and disdain in the gesture.

The winches stopped again. The hatch ceased swallowing the cable. It was stretched taut to the end of the boom. Below in the hold the men were releasing the slings from the case. Angelo watched from the deck. "You work like old women!" he shouted down. "The chops of your asses hang. Move! Move!"

"You talk with a big mouth upstairs!" Nick answered. "Outside you are not so tough."

The Kid was pulling one of the slings from under the end of the case. Somehow he tripped and fell.

"Good! Strangle yourself!" Angelo shouted down. "You dumb geep. But wait so I can give the signal to hang you myself."

The Kid was clear of the sling. The others had stepped back. Angelo lifted his finger, and the watchful Rosario and Frankie sent the winches rolling again and the cable and empty slings came up fast.

Down below, the men were already at the big case. Slowly, on the rollers, they shoved it back into the wings and placed it in its destined spot and then came away from it.

The slings had already swung out over the scow again and dropped down to the men working in the glare of the spotlight. They got the slings under the next big case and then stood back.

Angelo watched from the ship. He gave the sign, and the loose cable grew taut with life. It climbed upward out of the white glare of the spotlight into the darkness where the tip of the boom scraped the sky. Rosario tested its strength against the weight of the great case, and the case came up. The slings held. Then he dropped the case.

Angelo whirled around. "Easy! Son of a bitch! Easy!"

Rosario tightened his lips and cursed. Then he tried again. He was awkward, jerking the case. He bounced it twice and then steadied himself while Angelo looked at him across the deck with a mouthful of foulness that his anger could not spend.

The big case came up slowly then. The winch seemed to groan. The cable of the slings bit into the wood; wood was splintering. Mouths were open on the scow below, all eyes watching. Up. Up slowly, higher

than the deck. Then it hung there for a moment, and at Angelo's signal it was brought in and over the hatch, where it stopped again.

Angelo shoved the case, placed it, looked toward Rosario and Frankie, and moved his hand. The big case went down slowly like a box into a grave.

Before it touched bottom there was a shout from below again. Angelo cut with his hand. Rosario and Frankie stopped the winches.

Angelo shouted down, "Do we play *bocci* tonight, swine? What is the trouble now?"

"The roller!" the Kid shouted back.

The big vein came out on Angelo's forehead again. "You want to go home?" he said. "Eh? Home, you faces of whores! You men of nothing! You want to play with the roller, hey? Well, the souls of those who died on you, may they not rest in peace, you miserable bastards! Fix the roller. Fix it before I fire the load of you!"

The case hung there. The men below were quiet. They were tired. They had worked too long. They were cold. They were weary of Angelo's insults. The Kid wanted to say something, but his mind was clouded by anger. Even Joe wanted to say something for once. And old Tony nodded his head. The farm, he thought to himself. It would not be like this. The warm earth in your hands. The tomato, the pepper, the long zucchini. . . . He was dreaming.

"You talk too much," Nick said from below, not loudly, but in a clear, steady voice that Angelo could not fail to hear. "Scum! You said enough. I swear by the good Jesus Christ I'll bash your face in outside tonight. I'm through after tonight, but I'm going to leave you a present."

Angelo didn't answer for a while. He kept looking down. It was very quiet. Only the wind high up in the rigging could be heard sighing. "Fix the roller!" Angelo said almost calmly, but there was tension in his voice.

No one moved. The big case hung there motionless in the slings. It seemed to be waiting. The cable was taut, straining.

Nick went under the case then. He straightened the roller with gloved hands. He started to move back . . .

And suddenly the big case moved. It slipped away from one of the slings and came down. The men ran back under the wings. There was a splintering of wood, a heavy thud, and no more, nothing, nothing else, no sound, no movement, no cry of anguish, nothing but Nick's legs sticking out from under the great motionless case.

# SKIN

by

George Sturtevant

Murphy was studying the wet pavements of Lee Street through the dirt-streaked window of Harry's Pool Parlor. He didn't have a thing better to do. He was a small, thin, concave man, with lines of gray in his sparse dirt-blond hair. His hands sunk in his jeans, his feet spread slightly to support his idleness, his faded blue eyes studied the wet pavements.

Harry's parlor hung in the center of a hush, vast and compact. It was one of those days. The occasional truck or rig that navigated Lee Street did so on tiptoes. Only a muffled disturbance of air conveyed their passing reality. The billiard balls clicked softly under the cues. Players and loafers spoke in the quiet drawl of eastern Mississippi. It was one of those days; just a rainy midafternoon in an off season when the world communicates in whispers.

Murphy was thinking of everything and nothing. His mind in neutral revolved around its own axis, taking him now to inspect an insignificant army memoir, then to thoughts of evening milking, and the big supper, the late drinking in Jess Dullard's kitchen with Jess's blowsy wife lurking, pouring, drinking, and getting the rale and acting funny and making Jess angry again. Next it might free-wheel over words of an incomplete tune, then escape to reality and pose what's to be done for a living, what's to be done to pull out of this rural rut and get started on something worth-while in Vicksburg or Mobile. It inventoried the gossip automatically as each townsman sauntered by in the chill rain; and when Milly Blake went past it reminded him of that sticky time eight years ago when he almost had to marry her. Then a string bean

of a nigger in army uniform came up on the other side of the street and entered Wallace's General, and Murphy's memory came loose in a sudden explosion. He pulled his hands from his pockets and said, "Goddamn!"

Ray Henley looked up from chalking his cue and laughed softly. "What's matter, Murphy? See another o' yo' gals?"

"I saw a ghost," Murphy said. An enigmatic smile curled his thin lips and took all the color out of his eyes. "I never thought I'd live to see the day it happened. But here it is. Today's the day!"

"Today's the day for what?" Preacher Davies drawled. "What happens today?"

"It's a big day," Murphy said, and the smile was growing wider all the while. "Today's the day ole Murphy puts a nigger back inside his black skin. He's been running around without it long enough."

The last time Ray Henley had pulled his cue in the middle of a stroke was when the radio had announced the atom bomb. He pulled his stroke now. He straightened up, placed his cue carefully on the table, moved to the window, and waited for Murphy to talk. Preacher Davies put down his cue and came to the window and looked out blankly into the rain and waited for Murphy to talk. Long Frank Niles climbed unhurriedly out of the high chair, Balt Miggins left the tobacco counter, Harry came out from behind the cashbox. They all gathered in the window and looked into the slow rain and waited for Murphy to talk. Business and pleasure hung in rigid suspension. They wanted to know why and how Murphy was going to put a nigger back inside his black skin. The phrase was pure poetry and they wanted to know what it meant. No one said a word. They just loosened their muscles to permit their bodies to assume a favored position of relaxation; and they watched the cold rain and waited. . . .

Murphy was back in the big ward tent of the evacuation hospital on Anfa Hill. He was suffering from ulcers. The warm African sun of three years ago sparkled on the blue Atlantic and gleamed from the dazzling white paint of the magnificent Anfa Hotel. Its magic beaming on the canvas made the tent warm and good for lying around. He was waiting for Miss Gibbons to take his temperature. He was talking to Axle, the doughboy with the paralyzed legs, and listening to querulous sounds from the corner where three Northerners were playing cards with a nigger.

The nigger was built like a string bean, colored like onyx. He had long fingers made for manipulation, and had too much lip for a nigger. Murphy never knew his real name. They called him Skin, because that was his favorite game of cards, a real nigger game called Georgia skin.

To Skin the army was nigger heaven. Murphy had noticed that. There was no Jim Crow in the hospitals. The blacks were mixed right in with the whites. They got the same treatment as the whites, and threw the bull with them, and played cards and shot craps with them. They talked sassy to white doctors and nurses and got away with it. Maybe a talkative nigger like Skin couldn't help getting the impression that he belonged, especially with the Northern boys laughing at his jokes and gambling with him and letting him call them sonofabitch and bastard and other things. And maybe he felt secure because he didn't ever expect to see these white boys again after they left the hospital. And if it hadn't been for one thing maybe Murphy would never have remembered him either, because unless you have a good reason to remember a string-bean nigger all string-bean niggers look exactly alike.

That one thing Murphy remembered: the Northerners had put Skin up to it. He was winning money, telling jokes, and getting a big laugh. He was feeling secure in the anonymity of the army, and suffering from the impression that he belonged. So when the white boys put it up to him Skin was so warm from his own glory he popped right out with it.

"Hey dere, Murphy," he called out. "Hey dere, rebel. Come play me some cawds. Yo' cain't carry all dat money back home wit yo'. Come yere an' play me some cawds."

It sure was funny, the way Skin said it. The Northerners held their sides from laughing and egged the foolish nigger on.

"Yo' all ain't in Dixie now dere, rebel. Yo's in mah country. Yo's in Africa, an' dat's mah country. So les' be social, ole rebel. Come yere an' try a han' o' Go'gia skin."

Murphy felt his yards of intestines rolling up like field wire on a drum reel. Sweat formed between his fingers and in the palms of his hands. His jaws ached as he pushed a slow careless smile up on his face, but it took half the fun out of it for the boys because they couldn't see him getting angry. He was too clever for that; he'd been kidded before about niggers, and he never let the kidders think they had old Murphy's goat. He didn't operate that way. Anything there was between him and a nigger was his own business; and he'd settle in his own way, in his own time. So it was now.

He got up from his bunk and walked over to the corner where the cardplayers were. He straddled the bunk and gave Skin and the other boys his slow smile.

"Sure, I'll play you some cards, Skin," he drawled easily, just as though he were speaking to a white man. "Your money's as good as anybody's."

Skin cackled a laugh. "Don' yo' go 'specktin' t' win no money from dis nigger. Not when we's playin' Go'gia skin. Ah's got dis nigger a patent on dat game."

"Deal 'em," Murphy said. "We'll see what the cards got to say about it."

Skin won some of Murphy's money. It made him happy, old Skin being a very good winner. His success also kept his jaw as loose as a chicken's bowels. He talked. And he talked. And the more he talked the more Murphy studied his face, his form, his mode of speech. This was one nigger Murphy was never going to forget.

The game broke up when little Miss Gibbons and her freckles came to take temperatures again. She made them put the cards away.

"Murphy, I thought I told you to take a nap every afternoon," she said to him. "You'll never get that temperature down unless you stay in bed."

"Why don't you stay around and watch me?" Murphy asked. "You spend all your time out front watching those fly boys showing off. You ought to be in here doing your job." They could have been nasty words if you said them wrong, but Murphy never said them wrong to Miss Gibbons. She was one second lieutenant he would always like.

"Rebel, yo's right," Skin broke in. "Dat woman kills too much time lookin' fo' her boy fr'end's plane, an' ole Skin in yere maybe dyin' fo' a drink a water."

"Old Skin can get his own water," Miss Gibbons said, unruffled. "There's not a thing in the world wrong with old Skin."

"Ah's a sick soldat, ma'am. Ah needs lots a 'tention. Das why t 'armee pays yo'."

Skin was kidding. Miss Gibbons didn't mind; she was used to Skin; he had been in her ward since the day the hospital opened. But Murphy put it down in the little book of memory. Things were getting entirely too far out of focus when Mississippi niggers took to kidding white women.

Axle, the kid with the paralyzed legs, was thinking about it too.

"You're a funny rebel," he said when Murphy sat down on the adjoining cot. "I'm from Denver, so nothing bothers me. But you're the first guy from Mississippi I've seen that would talk nice with a nigger, and play him cards, and not stuff a foot in his mouth for talking like that to a white woman."

"No use gettin' mad, Axle," Murphy told him. "This is the army, and if the army says a nigger can live right in with white men there's nothin' I can do about it. But I'm not worryin' about that Skin. He'll get his in time. He'll slip with the wrong guy someday. Maybe it won't happen till he's home in Mississippi and forgets himself sometime and says the wrong thing to a white man or makes a remark to a white girl. That will be the end of that nigger."

"You take it pretty good, though," said Axle. "That is, you take it pretty good for a guy from Mississippi. I was in Shelby, and I know. Where niggers are concerned Mississippi is still a slave state."

"We know how to take care of them," Murphy said. "We haven't got that many niggers without knowing how to handle 'em."

"Skin's too smart," said Axle. "He's too damn smart for his own good. I don't like a smart guy. Somebody ought to bring him down a peg."

"I will. I'll bring him down plenty when I get the chance." Murphy was rubbing his nervous right fist in the palm of his left hand. "I'll do it in my own good time. I'll tell you something, Axle, seein' you think I don't take this serious. Skin's got to go home sometime, and so do I. When we go home we both go to Mississippi. And this is the important part: we both go to the same town."

Axle looked up with surprise. "You knew Skin before you came in the army?"

"I didn't say that. I just been listenin' to Skin talk. He used to live in Mobile. But just before he came in the army his folks moved. They moved to my town." Murphy's gaze moved lazily around the ward and came to rest on Skin's string-bean figure stretched out on his bunk. "I never saw him before he came in the army, Axle, but I'll sure be lookin' him up after he gets out."

"Skin should know better than to talk like that to a guy from his home town. Did you tell him where you're from?"

"I told him I was from Vicksburg. Good to let him think that. It'll be a beautiful surprise for him to find we're neighbors. He might even invite me over to play him some cards." Murphy laughed bluntly at the thought.

"You got a dirty laugh, Murphy," said Axle. "A damn dirty laugh. You should never laugh out loud."

"I'm thinkin' of a nigger," Murphy said. "You want to play some checkers?"

When Murphy finished his story the whole picture was sketched loosely in the minds of his listeners. He had told it with quick brushwork; he wanted the image imbedded with them by the time old Skin came out of Wallace's General. They could see him through the window, moving from counter to counter and buying something once in a while. It was taking him a long time. It always took a nigger a long time to get his buying done in Wallace's General. Old man Wallace liked to keep them waiting; and if a white came in he'd naturally break off from the nigger and go handle the white trade.

"So that's ole Skin," Ray Henley said pleasantly. "Ah feels ah knows him like a brother."

The other men laughed. There was a feeling of excited communication. Long Frank Niles was rubbing his hands briskly, like a man eager to get at a job of work. Balt Miggins and Preacher Davies were pulling on their raincoats. Harry went over by the cashbox and came back with a leather key holder.

"I can't leave the business," he said. "Here's the keys to my car. Who's gonna drive?"

"Ah'd be proud to," said Ray, and he took the keys. "We won't get nothin' on the upholstery."

"That's right, we won't," Murphy said. "I'm pleased to accept your company, boys, but remember Skin's my chicken. I don't intend to hurt him. I just want to see him crawl back inside that black hide of his."

"Sure, sure," said Balt Miggins, "he's your nigger. We jus' want to watch an' maybe he'p bring the light to ole Skin if'n he's still got any of that bright talk left in him."

"We better git in the car," Long Frank said. "Ole Skin looks like he's ready to pay."

"Be careful of my car, boys," Harry called after them. "Be sure you get him out before you rough him up."

Ray Henley parked Harry's Dodge just short of the railroad crossing where Lee Street is bounded on either side by vacant lots.

"When we get ole Skin in the car, carry us down by the swamp,"

Murphy said. "I been thinkin' this out a long time and I got it figured how I want to do it."

"Here comes Skin," said Ray. "Ah kin pick him up in the rear view."

"Let me handle it," Murphy said again.

Balt and Long Frank crunched their butts in the ash tray. They were sitting in front with Ray. Preacher was in the back seat with Murphy. He looked through the back glass.

"He's just about here," he said to Murphy. "You better get ready."

"I've been ready for years, Preacher."

Old Skin was whistling as he came opposite the car. He held several large bundles under his arms. He looked up curiously when the car door opened.

"Hello, Skin!" Murphy said brightly, getting out of the car. "I see you got your ruptured duck."

"Yes, suh, boss," Skin said nervously. He looked obliquely at Murphy but seemed not to recognize him. "Ah jus' got loose dis mawnin'."

"You got quite a load there, Skin. Come on, get in the car. We'll give you a lift. Got to help our soldiers, you know."

Skin's eyes became like two fried eggs with brown yolks and plenty of white. He inched away.

"Thank yo' verra politely, boss," he said nervously. "But ah doesn't have but a quoter mile t' go. Ah kin walk it fine, thank yo', boss."

"Get in," Murphy said, taking his arm. "I'm an ole buddy of yours. You remember ole Murphy, Skin. We was good buddies in Africa. You called me rebel, we was such good buddies. Remember?"

Skin remembered and immediately repealed a step he was about to take in the direction of the car. Preacher was out of the car too, and he took Skin's other arm.

"Get in, nigger," said Preacher. "Ain't you got manners enough to accept a favor?"

"Lay off him," Murphy said. "Skin's an ole war buddy of mine, and I want to treat him right."

Skin got in the car with utmost reluctance. There wasn't much else he could do with a white man at either elbow and three more of them staring coldly from the front seat. Murphy and Preacher got in and put Skin between them like the meat in a sandwich. Ray slipped the car into gear and shot off toward the swamp.

"Ah sho' does 'member yo', Mis' Murphy," Skin tried nervously. "We's had our li'l jokes in dat dere hospital. Ah sho' 'members well."

"So do I, nigger. I remember very well."

Skin's long, knotted hands trembled in embrace. More of the white showed in his eyes. His lips blubbered as he started to speak again, and he had to stop trying. The white men sat loosely in their pall of silence.

Skin's frightened eyes noted they were clear of the town now and his last hope evaporated. "W'at yo' gonna do t' dis pore nigger, Mis' Murphy? Dis pore nigger never meant no harm."

Murphy didn't answer.

Ray pulled off the main road and piloted the car down a grass-grown trail, through a little knot of willows, and stopped the car short of the black morass of the small swamp.

Skin trembled convulsively and began to sob.

"W'at yo' gonna do, Mis' Murphy?"

The white men piled out of the car. Skin cast his great eyes wildly about him, seeking salvation.

"Git out, nigger," Long Frank said. "Mistah Murphy wants to talk t' yo'."

Skin remained fastened to his seat. Long Frank reached in and seized the collar of Skin's Eisenhower jacket. He pulled the balking man clear of the car with one mighty tug. Skin got his balance and turned pleading eyes and hands to Murphy. There was a small smile on Murphy's lips.

"You listen to me, nigger," Murphy said quietly. "You're back in Mississippi now, and I just want to put you straight. You do like you're told and you won't get hurt too bad." Skin shook his head in absolute affirmation of every word. "Last time I saw you, nigger, you were a pretty proud nigger with a lot of lip. You were actin' like a white man. Maybe you rubbed against so many white skins you thought you were getting whiter. Maybe you thought you were as good as a white man, talkin' to a white woman the way you talked to that nurse. And you wanted to play cards with white men, and to call them sonofabitch and bastard. You remember all that, nigger?"

Skin's bobbing head agreed. "But, Mis' Murphy, dis nigger was jus' makin' a joke, suh."

"Niggers don't make jokes with white men, nigger," Balt Miggins rasped. "Where'd yo' ever learn such a thing?"

"You just got out of your black skin while you was in the army," Murphy said. "And now it's time for you to get back inside it. First

thing, you get out of that uniform. You won't be needin' it any more. That uniform gives niggers like you too many big ideas."

Skin began to protest but saw Long Frank cock his arm. Skin's trembling fingers unfastened the buttons of the Ike jacket.

"Jus' don't give us no lip, nigger," Long Frank said. "Yo' jus' git those army clothes off fas' yo' kin."

Skin could say nothing. His lips were blubbering out of control and large tears glistened on his cheeks. The white men watched silently as the black man fumbled with the buttons of his shirt.

Balt Miggins caught Murphy's eye. "He's a powerful slow nigger, Murphy. Think us boys should assist him a mite?"

Murphy pondered a moment, nodded affirmatively. Balt and Preacher and Long Frank stepped forward eagerly and seized the shaking man and stripped his clothes from him violently. Skin cried one long, piercing cry, and Ray Henley stepped up and crashed a fist into his mouth.

"Quiet, nigger," he said. "Yo' start that yo' sure to git hurt bad."

The white men stepped back. Skin stood shivering in the center of the little group, his lean black hide open to the cold rain. Balt made a remark about Skin's fixings, and the men laughed, except Murphy. He stepped forward and surveyed Skin's goose-pimply body.

"I still see traces of white," he announced. "We got to get those white streaks out of his body."

Murphy grabbed Skin's arm suddenly, jerked, twisted, shoved. Skin lost balance, went sprawling face forward into the filthy black slime on the swamp's edge. The white men laughed explosively, except Murphy—his face remained quiet and composed.

The party turned gleeful then. Each time Skin managed to crawl to the bank and regain his feet one of the men would hurl him back into the slime. Twice Long Frank bounced rocks off his thin shoulders. Finally Balt, instead of shoving, knocked the groggy Skin over with a powerful blow on the face. Skin struggled to his haunches and remained cringing in the fetid blackness, holding his hands over his face. He moaned low, fitfully. Long Frank picked up a big rock, but Murphy stayed the throw.

"That's enough," he said. "I think ole Skin gets the idea." Long Frank stepped back reluctantly but did not drop the rock. "You there, Skin," Murphy called out. "You see what color your skin is now? You make sure you keep it that color for the rest of your life."

Murphy turned and walked back to the car. The other men followed, laughing and talking with animation. Before leaving, Long Frank cocked his arm and heaved the heavy rock. Skin still had his face in his hands and he didn't see the rock coming. It hit against his head with a dull thud. Skin screamed. The white men turned to see him standing shakily in the mud, his wild hands trying to curb the gush of blood.

"That'll learn him," said Long Frank as he got into the car. "That ole nigger won't be gettin' out of his hide no more."

For the first time Murphy laughed aloud, curtly. He leaned forward to pat Long Frank on the back.

"Nice shot, Frank," he said. "We sure put that nigger back in his skin. I wish ole Axle from Denver was here to see how we handle smart niggers in Mississippi."

The big Dodge whined up the highway in the gathering dusk, and in his enthusiasm Ray Henley zigzagged all the way back into town.

# TALES FROM THE VIENNA WOODS

## A Chapter from an Autobiography

by

Hilde Abel

*For Madeleine Brennan*

To walk the streets of this city again is to traverse the landscape of a dream, to tread the pavement of one's deepest terrors. For a man is like a city, besieged, assaulted, sacked by the enemy, ruined a thousand times, and building upon the ruin new edifices that never escape the primal need, the first and continual climate. Oh, Imperial Vienna, was not the climate felicitous? Why did it award no fruition? . . . The river that winds—the first cradling water, ripped, bursting, and mingled with blood. The thrusting mountains whose ranges, looked down upon from the bomb sight, revealed the valley, the secret declivity, to be penetrated and torn. The far-off fruit and vineyards, whose ripening in sun was scraped out by the knife of the surgeon who is without mercy.

A sensation enfolds me that is impossible to know save in dreams, in the blood and anguish of nightmare—the dread and the longing for the shadowy purposeful meeting, the face-to-face with the one who is never there. The one who lived unrecognized, side by side, in this city, who jostled my elbow, perhaps, as I boarded the streetcar, sat beside me in the café smiling over his newspaper, or collided for an instant as I whirled across the glittering floor and bowed, *"Entschuldige, Fräulein."* Who slunk, after each accostal, into his secret place to whet the knife, to carve a finer edge. . . . If I find him who opened the wall of the Inner City to the enemy, I will find him who lunged at me with the knife.

Here on this razed and busy thoroughfare, they are streaming by, those who were contemporaneous with me, those who are dead, and those who were not yet born. Bound in the lock step of the concentration camp, of the victims, the hopeless, the abandoned, they seek, they tramp in restlessness, their faces bent to the ground and overlaid by the darkness of their stooping. One pounces upon a cigarette butt. Another treads upon his hand, and the face of the first lifts in agony.

"Karl!"

*"Grüss dich Gott, Hilde."*

"What's new with you, Karl?"

"I died."

"Oh, Karl! . . . I am so sorry! . . . I was so fond of you!"

"Were you? . . . You managed to keep it pretty well under your hat, my girl."

"I was afraid."

A new fear, searing—that one of Karl is so long ago, so far away—creeps beneath my scalp. . . . Had that been the first flashing of the knife, that fear of one, gentle and gaunt, whose need drew from me only hatred? . . . I had thought, standing upon the rim of the Danube with Karl, my back turned upon him, that it was the flashing of the sun far up on the river.

"But, Karl, you shouldn't have died. . . . You had an appointment with all those things you were going to do. . . . Remember? . . . We used to talk about it often enough, God knows. . . . There, in that café house . . . there in that very hole where there used to be a café house. . . ."

"Stop reproaching me, my girl. . . . What could I do about it? . . . I might have lived in you, if——"

"Why, Karl," I laugh, "you make it sound exactly like a cancer!"

"Or a child," he says gravely. "Unless you might consider conception a tumor of the womb, to be——"

"Surgically scraped . . . is that what you mean, Karl?"

"There are no women nowadays," he says. "Only men with flies and men without."

Now we are in the groove, all right. The same old groove. Tooth and claw. Hammer and tongs. Until my life, outranking his death, forces upon me *noblesse oblige*.

"I've thought about you often, Karl. . . . I even looked in the paper for your name once."

"What for?"

"Why, to see if you were dead, of course."

"How morbid!"

"Not at all!" Heavens, how irritating he still can be! "The names of many of the prominent dead Socialists were printed even in our newspapers."

"Stop talking riddles!"

"Well, if you simply won't remember, you can run over to our Public Library any time—the one with the stone lions that wag their tails every time a virgin passes. Just ask for the files on Dollfuss' picnic with the Reds. It won't take long to run through. February 12, 1934, to February 16, 1934."

"I died from exile—or a fire bomb over London—in '43. Won't that satisfy you?"

"It's not that I have anything against fire bombs. . . . But if you had to die—and who doesn't?—I sort of hoped it would be in '34. . . . The same numbers, but inverted. . . . Mirror writing. . . . There is no escape from fate."

Again, in my mind's eye, I glimpse that brilliance, blinding above the summer stillness, and I had not known as I sat on the terrace at Cobenzl clicking glasses with Karl and singing, "With banners high, the Red battalions march," that the murderer's knife flashed warning at us. I had cried out to him, "See how beautiful is the sun glinting on the wings of the Vienna-Hamburg plane!"

"You're very generous with other people's timetables," he says. "'I hoped you'd be dead in '34,'" he mimics in a hideous falsetto voice. "Give your own nine years away!" he snarls.

"Well, I daresay I might just as well have because, by that time, I was already murdered."

"I saw *your* name in the paper," Karl says.

"Really? In connection with the murder? Then tell me quick, tell me, whom did the newspaper name? Whom?"

"It was just a list of names," Karl says casually. "Nothing sensational." But that old nasty expression that I remember so well from all our cat-and-dog fights creeps over his face. Cat-and-dog, that is, if you think, as I always do, of cat as female and dog as male. "Just a list of names on a passenger list out of Spain."

"Oh, that! Back in August, '36."

And then I begin to see what he is driving at and I follow up hastily.

"But I was so young then, so young. . . . When the nice American battleship rolled up and asked if we wouldn't just like to step on board for a breath of salt air . . . I mean, wouldn't it have been vulgar to stay and pitch into a purely family squabble?"

"That was two more years than you gave me," he says. "Let's see—in '34 I'd reached the ripe old age of twenty-five."

"I was for the right side in Spain, of course. . . . Don't think for a moment that . . . All right-minded people were . . . But that doesn't mean you want to . . . Just after getting your B.A. and all. I took my B.A. in history, oddly enough. And then simply to have been slain by history——"

"You Americans!" he snarls. "Always on evacuation lists! You eternal tourists!"

"An exile's not a tourist, I suppose!"

I cannot think I really want to say this to him. He is so gaunt and bitter, so sad and angry, and I *do* outrank him. . . . Ah, he was the European par excellence. *I* should stay home with the babies and the diapers; *he* would sign our name—*his* name, of course—to immortality with his work. Up the banners! *Hoch* the bluestocking! Was ever American girl more grossly propositioned?

Now we are at the Opera House. Through the façade I can glimpse the sweep of the grand staircase and there is still the smell of burning.

"Karl!" I say. "Karl!" forgetting that he had, at that time, been consumed to ash by exile, "why did we tourists erase the Opera House from Baedeker?"

But he is no longer there. This time he has really left me flat, borne by the tide flooding the street of sorrow.

Oh, well, the tourist visit to the Opera House must have been a mistake. After all, on the Norden bomb sight the itinerary is so close—the freight yards but a hairbreadth away.

How oft we lingered on that railroad bridge over the yards, George and I, returning from a healthy day of sun and air and pure-driven snow, and watching the moonlight grope along the steel toward a frontier and a new country. The trouble was, we never could agree on just which train to take. . . .

Snow seemed to draw George. He froze, later, before Stalingrad, a perfectly disinterested death, seeing that he was neither German nor Russian. Ah, these Englishmen—the sun never sets on their self-questioning, Byron in Greece, George in a blizzard before Stalingrad. . . .

In those days when I knew him, he often wore an embroidered Russian blouse, a present from a lusty Rhinelander in the student house where they lived. He looked so nice in it, he had such a pretty face, George did, the prettiest face I ever saw. . . . When he went with me to the photographer's once, she quite forgot *me* and just went on snapping George in his Russian blouse. . . . He certainly could throw things into a state of confusion, my little George, what with the photographer—a lady who wore tweed suits and a crew cut—and the Rhinelander, and the South American heiress who sent him a check each month all the way from her hacienda, she was so sure he would be a great artist! (Have you ever seen his pictures? Maybe he died too young.) And his mother, of course.

We'd stop a moment on that bridge, returning from our day of health, and he'd take out his wallet, stuffed with pesos he hadn't converted yet on the black Börse, and show me his mother's snapshot in the moonlight. The moonlight turned the paper face pale as horror, and each time he'd say, "Did I ever show you this snapshot of my mother? . . . See, she looks like a little black witch. . . . How'd you like to live in a little farmhouse in Wales? Thatched roof . . . mud floor . . . fetch and carry for my mother . . . see your nails grow black and broken. . . . My South American, she spent a summer in Wales. You'd never have known her when my mother, the witch, got through with her." He'd stop and chuckle, and I'd stop and chuckle with him. Such a peculiarly satisfactory pain, laughing at yourself. At one and the same time you applaud and punish yourself. Punish yourself for what? Why, for applauding, of course. . . . There was no doubt I'd have known his South American, even when his mother got through with her. Was there anything about that doting woman I didn't know? Who mixed her cocktails, what she thought about in the middle of the night when she lay unsleeping. . . . We read all her letters together and for me there was a double pleasure. The joy of laughing at her outpourings was doubled by a second sight. I could project myself right there where we had her, and see George and the Rhinelander laughing over my cocktails and my midnight meditations. . . . I could even hear that sound of lusty male laughter. (How oddly titillating to compete with a man for a man. . . . All sorts of violent, fascinating pictures would run through my mind like a sort of private cinema, you know the kind I mean.) Whenever I imagined George and the Rhinelander laughing over my letters, it added just that dash of pain to the pleasure principle that made it quite ecstatic. The only trouble was that I could never be

altogether sure whether it was George I loved, or merely the whip. If it were the whip, it made things much simpler—no complication of Rhinelander, heiress, mother. I tell you, we were a regular three-ring circus, with me the ringmaster of the lot, cracking the whip—at myself. If it weren't George I loved, but the whip, I could just as well go into any shop and buy one. Then again, it would seem to me that it wasn't as much fun whipping oneself. Just as, you know, it's no fun scratching oneself. Much better if someone else does it. . . .

Then, as we'd finally step off that bridge, George would say, "She's Jewish, my heiress, but she's not one bit stingy."

"In my country, it's the Scots we make those jokes about," I'd say.

"In my country," George would say, "it's the Jews. . . . Either they're stingy or they splurge just to show off. We have two sets of jokes."

But as I never knew just which he meant by his country, England or Germany, I never found out which had this interesting dualistic humor.

"Sometimes," he'd say as we got off that bridge into the street, "it makes me angry when I think over all the women I've known. They're always Jewish. . . . My friend, the Rhinelander, belongs to a new movement. . . . I'll tell you about it when we go upstairs. . . . All those Jewish women—do you think it can be coincidence, or what?"

"Hilde! . . . Hilde! . . ."

Well . . . Well . . . That familiar childish voice pulling me away from the bridge of indecision, that simply led from here to there, and there to here. The tourists did, after all, get it later when they found they'd made a mistake about the Opera House. But it's already being repaired, that bridge. Damn!

"Hilde! . . . Hilde! . . ."

She returns me to the Opera, where Karl left me flat. How often I have heard her voice—in dreams, begging for mercy. Before I turn around to face her, I gird my hatred, I pull my terrible wrath together, and then I bend, and from the debris that litters the street of her city, I pick my instrument, a stone sharp and pointed. How long I have waited for just this! I turn, my arm lifted with murder.

It is no use.

My arm remains in mid-air, the weapon clatters to the street.

"Hilde, didn't Rudolf ever give you my message? . . . I sent my love with him when he emigrated."

"Your love? . . . Did he never write you *my* message?"

"He did. I could not understand it."

"Nor could I understand your love."

We stand looking at each other, utterly baffled and sad. . . . Love, sent me by one who pinned the cross of hatred, the small double cross, on her lapel. And now the very moment of revenge defeats me, transforms the enemy into the victim, and only the grave beareth away victory. Yet, spared, she remains the enemy. Must one always, then, be so doubly defeated?

"I cannot understand," she repeats. "I sent my love."

She cannot understand. I am triply defeated.

I was her best friend, and all the boys she loved she might have seen later—did she ever?—washing the pavements of this city with acid, or dragged off, screaming, for that final trip. . . . Lisl with her Jew boys, me with my goyim. How many of mine later became those who lashed the others' naked backs! . . . We did not know in those days that further in our epoch a man with whom neither of us was acquainted, a certain Robert Ley, would write a letter to Lisl and me, and anyone else whose odd compulsions might move him to listen, "Hate and love lie very close together. . . . We have sinned and the Jews must return to Germany, that we may expiate ourselves, or they will be forever accursed." Then he carried out the sentence on himself, to hang by the neck till dead.

But now, I remember. She never got his letter, after all, because by then she too was dead. It is impossible to imagine that, seeing her now so young and full of grace, no different from the last time that I saw her, and saw her pin to her lapel the glittering cross, her own suicide note to the world in which she quite finally stated her case, the pride and joy of her hatred. For a moment now, I wonder how I appear to her dead eyes. Does she see me, too, as young and full of grace? Has the present dropped away from me, too? Is that why she cannot understand?

Lisl has hooked her arm through mine and is dragging me with her through the throng of evening promenaders. Slowly, the words of that letter to the world fade from my mind. Moment by moment, I find myself becoming *jeune fille* again, *enfant terrible*. . . . First a giggle, then a smirk, as in those far-off days when, with Lisl, I dropped my vicious companions and became with her, for a moment, a vicious child. . . . I struggle feebly, but of what avail? . . . It is quite impossible to escape the clutch of the dead. . . . I surrender, I sink, I drown. . . .

Round the Ring we go, round and round, until the old lightheaded sensation crowns my head like a wreath of field flowers But now at least I know that it is not the jag of youth but merely the going round and round in a circle. Sometimes one should change direction, as every good waltzer knows.

So we would whirl in the old days, but now, alas, we can't stop to snitch bonbons as we used to at that little shop. It's not bombed, just locked up. The lady is away for a lifetime. Such a comical lady! Who'd have thought a lame, dried-out little stick like that would have had such a sense of fashion! One of those people who have the daring to create the mode for those who, afterward, merely follow. There was the little sign pasted in the middle of her window, lettered all higgledy-piggledy as a child might: "From Jewish commerce we renunciate ourselves."

I tell you if we didn't slip in there a hundred times, we didn't slip in there once, Lisl and I—lots of our friends, too; Reds, too. . . . The comical little lady was nearsighted and never recognized us. . . . We'd point way up to the top shelf, and out she'd drag her old rickety ladder and up she'd hobble. "No, not there!" we'd shriek. "There—there—in that corner!" Over she'd lean, a tiny black woman with a crossed eye, and as she leaned 'way out, about to bring her tiny bones tinkling like glass onto the floor, we'd scream, "We're Jewish commerce, you know. . . ." (That was Lisl's joke because she wasn't. It was I, oddly enough, who always felt the impostor.) We'd snitch a handful of *dragées* from the counter and through the door we'd streak like greased lightning, and down the ladder she'd come limping, across her hooked nose a streak of dirt from the dusty corner where we'd sent her. How her curses would rend the tender gray Baroque air while Lisl and I would be doubled up in the doorway of the corrupted palace next door, giggling! . . . The whole street would come out. The golden heart of Vienna was always ready to drop business for a little merrymaking, especially in those leisurely days of world crisis. All of them would be sputtering and rocking with laughter at the old witch; the Rosenbergs, leather, Aryan; and the Rosenbergs, porcelain, non-Aryan, and all the other golden hearts on that chic business street who stuck out the Red Flag on May Day, and then on further May Days stuck out the red-white-red that came into style on the point of Dollfuss' bayonets, until the old pagan May Days rolled round again, which put the Indian sign on more than half the street. (Good old human nature, which you can never change. . . . Red-white-red, brown. . . . Protective coloration, no doubt.)

Then, borne upon the intoxication of youth and the waves of laughter, merry as a marriage bell, we two little pranksters would wend our homeward way, munching our stolen sweets.

It was, when Lisl and I returned from school, that hour of magic when the cats took over the fashionable promenade of the city. I was not aware of the significance of this magic transformation at the hour of the *apéritif* and often speculated with Lisl as to why so many Toms stalked the two playful little kittens. Were we really no longer grubby schoolgirls? Were we really become succulent as the sweets we munched, one with plucked surprised brows and sun-tan powder and beginning to turn plump as a pigeon on the wonderful Viennese diet of whipped cream. The other, blonde as breakfast food, with the turned-up nose of a charming little Austrian ceramic pig, and a figure—oh, my, that figure—how it drew the paterfamilias! Why, I remember once when Lisl turned round to find her own daddy pinching her fanny! . . . We trembled on the verge of all of girlhood's rosy blossoming dreams, standing with reluctant feet where the brook and river meet, womanhood and girlhood fleet. . . . A boudoir in Paris, harems in Istanbul, the casting couch in Hollywood. There were no heights our youthful courage could not scale. Alas for innocence! There came a day when our friend Hans, jealous of our guileless little favors, our smiles, our glances, so liberally distributed to the most casual of strangers, and withheld from him, there came a day when Hans, the snake, put us out of paradise.

"Nice girls," he told me, "do not go parading on the Ring at twilight."

Simply and unalterably, it turned out, because at that sentimental hour all nice girls are occupied at home pouring tea for Mamma and Papa and the fiancé, who will arrive at any moment after ogling the little scamps and harum-scarums along the Ring and who, before stepping across the threshold of the drawing room, will hastily run a finger down to see that his dress is not disarrayed.

Oh, my! Somewhere in this city now, I had to find Hans, too. It isn't often that a girl is loved like that. You kick the puppy, and back he crawls on his fat little tummy to lick your foot. Oh, delicious! Pick him up by his fat little ruff and dangle him a moment before you drop him and break his brittle bones. Oh, look, he's wriggling back again, whimpering, to lick my foot! Oh, delicious, delicious, delectable, exquisite! . . . There are people, even, who like to be flogged. Imagine! In my day, as a matter of fact, it was quite the thing to be crucified. Little

notices would appear in the agony column of the newspaper: "Who to be crucified wishes shall himself at four o'clock to a congenial and vivacious young lady present. All under the most discreet circumstances conducted. 10 Blutgasse, 1. . . ." Now that everyone has been crucified, the vogue has passed. The prime condition for such pleasures to be fully consummated is that they arise out of one's own deepest subconscious need, and not be prescribed, willy-nilly, by someone who thinks it might be good for you.

Just as soon as I found out from that snake, Hans, that it was naughty to stroll homeward through the evening promenade of cats, the real joy of our daily odyssey began.

We plunged ahead, two little kiddies, clutching each other's hand, two little maidens arms entwined in the chaste ecstatic love of girlhood, fanning, blowing upon, the fires that swirled about us. We smiled, we smirked; a gentleman followed, tall as Papa and as impeccably invested, and then we fled, we two little daughters, we stuck out our tongues and fled. Two little minxes, two little kittens—why, what can the gentleman want of *us?* The thought of what the gentleman might want of us drove our breath in flames of fear through our nostrils. The horny scales spurted on our virgin flesh. Our hands and feet shriveled to claws. We became dragons, armored by our fear of what we had so playfully stirred up. Oh, halcyon days! Oh, *alten Burschen—Herrlichkeit!* The way was still open, the escape; no street led to a dead end. We clung to each other in maiden passion, two little girls in love—with each other, with our dolls, with the little cribs to which we would repair, unmolested save by dreams, after our wearying way.

There came an evening when the streets were illumined not yet by electricity, but by the sunset, the lingering afterglow, of all the dark unhappy years that had, already then, passed over this avenue. There came an evening when we ran shrieking from Uncle Albert, not with glee at the merry trick that we had played, but as children who must make noise, who must hear themselves in the harrowing yellow color of anguish that had not yet been replaced by the yellow glow of lamps. There was a moment when, as our heads swung forward again from Uncle Albert, whom we had already outdistanced by many paces, we saw one coming toward us, his hand outstretched. Terror pinned us; this was the real pursuit, this coming toward us, this head-on meeting, and not the following, the swift footsteps after. We stood; he came abreast. In that moment there were no other living creatures on the avenue save

we who met; for us two there was no help. In his outstretched hand, the little green and orange and yellow candies sparkled and sputtered like jewels. We could not move, Lisl and I; we dared not lift our eyes to look upon his face. Then our love for each other, stronger even than our fear, for it remained now our only armor against our fear, tipped our heels with wind. We fled, and all around us we heard laughter, not our own. He alone had offered that for which we hungered, and our heels were winged till we reached my house; paid the concierge ten groschen for the lift; sped along the unlit shadowy hall, down whose spiral staircase, not long later, when the descending lift seemed too slow, they were flung who at that moment sat behind walls all around us, cozily tucked into napkins while the overhead lamp cast its comfortable circle upon the evening meal. . . . We lay all that night in each other's arms, trembling.

Had that been he? . . . I seek now to tear myself from Lisl, who in our wild careen around the Ring may bring me once more face to face with him.

"Lisl, for God's sake, let me go! For the sake of our old friendship that ripened into hate!"

"Never!" she cries. "Never! . . . I sent you love with Rudolf and you sent me hate. Pinned beneath the flaming pavements of Berlin with my sons—a son each year for my Führer—I was burned to a crisp with your hatred."

"Ah," I cry, finding an appeal for her hard heart, "that was it. Your Führer. Can't you see? . . . The wicked witch who'd have pushed your little Gretel into the oven. . . . Let me go!"

"Ah, old pal," she says, "don't believe those atrocity stories!"

"And think, upon the pile of charred bone, one indestructible bit of brightness gleaming. My gold inlay, to be plucked out, beaten, forged—perhaps into a gold tip for your Führer's fountain pen."

"Ah, come, you are too fanciful," she says. "I'd have hidden you under my bed, fed you scraps snitched from my own stalwart sons, whose births each year defiled my figure. . . . With all this fountain-pen-tip talk of yours, still and all, it was I who ended up in the oven. . . . Come now! Admit that—won't you?"

"I suppose it's true," I say, desperately seeking to throw off her hooking arm. . . . It is so hard to be free of the dead when they lie within the winding sheet of your curses and your maledictions. "But what of all those unknown relatives of mine whom you neither fed nor hid?"

we who met; for us two there was no help. In his outstretched hand, the little green and orange and yellow candles sparkled and sputtered like jewels. We could not move, Lisl and I; we dared not lift our eyes to look upon his face. Then our love for each other, stronger even than our fear, for it remained now our only armor against our fear, tipped our heels with wind. We fled, and all around us we heard laughter, not our own. He alone had offered that for which we hungered, and our heels were winged till we reached my house; paid the concierge ten groschen for the lift; sped along the unlit shadowy hall, down whose spiral staircase, not long later, when the descending lift seemed too slow, they were flung who at that moment sat behind walls all around us, cozily tucked into napkins while the overhead lamp cast its comfortable circle upon the evening meal. . . . We lay all that night in each other's arms, trembling.

Had that been he? . . . I seek now to tear myself from Lisl, who in our wild careen around the Ring may bring me once more face to face with him.

"Lisl, for God's sake, let me go! For the sake of our old friendship that ripened into hate!"

"Never!" she cries. "Never! . . . I sent you love with Rudolf and you sent me hate. Pinned beneath the flaming pavements of Berlin with my sons—a son each year for my Führer—I was burned to a crisp with your hatred."

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me because I was still young and there was always that possibility that I might not end up as badly as she; I, silently cursing her, because she was old and presented me with the *fait accompli* of the survival of the fittest. Then when the hatred got so thick that we were both gasping for air, she'd get up and bring out the tour de force of the shipwreck, the fur coat. She'd preen and turn for me, and then not to make it too obvious, she'd tell me she'd dressed to run out for a nice cup of coffee and a bit of a chat with her cronies in the café on the corner. Of course, I knew she was deceiving me. I knew that she'd just sit in the café house without the price of a cup of coffee and, after a decent interval, leave her tengroschen tip for the waiter and then come back and tell me, "Frau Baron's widow told me I appeared in highest style. Oh, my lovely coat, I could never part with it!"

It was a pussycat of a coat, all right. How I petted it, stroked it, buried my face in its tickling warmth, and listened to it purr! But I wasn't having any, no, ma'am! I knew just as soon as I put that coat on my back, the hex would be on me, too. Here she was, a beautiful woman, really beautiful, you know, none of this piddling nonsense about "fine eyes" or "wavy hair," a Frau General's widow, brought up in a castle, and since 1914—the year of the coat—nothing good had ever happened to her again. (And even so, though neither of us knew it then, she had a ticket for a repeat performance, another revolution and another war.) And here was I, merely with the "fine eyes" and "wavy hair," not yet anyone's widow, but surely not a general's, and brought up in an apartment house without battlements and a moat. If fate had dared so to tamper with her, an absolutely first-class citizen, how much less consideration might not I, a second-class citizen, the kind who in the normal course of events gaped at her kind from the gallery or a table near the kitchen door, expect at the hands of a snobbish fate. . . . She went with her coat to the pawnshop, got a few shillings, bought a ticket on the Sweepstakes, and did not win, and we continued all year to intercept each other's murderous glances across the little table of relics. . . . Ah, well, you cannot weep for each one who goes under. You'd have to carry around your own private system of reservoirs, pipes, and aerial sprays, it would take such quantities of water.

The one thing you could not have believed about all these poor wretches—so remote from them was any slightest hint of sun or summer—was that they all were part of my good old times, my verdant summer days. . . . The beauty of life is that each one, as he comes along, is given

his instant upon the crest of the wave, from which he can look down upon the poor fish and crustaceans tossed from the previous wave, whose poorness and wretchedness are of the very joy of the moment of surging eminence, and whom he will later look back upon in an entire recall of nostalgia when he, in turn, becomes the dregs.

The good old times of the *Rechtsanwalt,* the cracked little organist, who did not yet await the pleasure of consuming morsels already caressed by another's lips, the Frau General's widow, had been long ago, when my particular wave was still only a glinting of the sun upon the very edge of the horizon. In that unending chain of backward time (the mother who displays a box of oatmeal to her eager child, on which box is depicted a mother who displays a box of oatmeal to her eager child, on which, etc., etc.) my wretches no doubt also dwelt nostalgically upon their own halcyon days. Or shall we say, depicted on the box which they held in their hand were some people who could not, unfortunately, even recall their good old times, consisting entirely as they did, in those happy days of empire, *tu felix* Austria, of the months when they had floated in the waters of forgetfulness within their mothers' bellies. These were the rats who swarmed in the various picturesque holes in which a really ancient city abounds; starved, coughed, hemorrhaged, and died. There were those, even, who, unable to find a rathole, slept each night beneath the many graceful bridges that span the opposite shores of the city, and, in time, became so attached to these airy quarters that they not merely spent the night, but settled down, ate, fornicated, and searched the pockets of various enigmas that drifted past, face-down, immersed once more within the waters of forgetfulness.

Now I, too, borne upon reflections, thoughts, memories, in which I am immersed as in the waters of that river, find that I have strayed from the Ring. I cannot say how, but effortlessly, and without the conscious intent, I have escaped that outer artery of the city and am now cradled within its very deep, the inmost darkness where the seed first slept and grew. . . .

The deep, the overhanging roofs of this arcaded square stain the world's light perpetually to dusk. Here, the bones and flesh of the first mother, Rome, thrust through the lineaments of the city. Here, the worn and splendid mother meets and mingles with her children; she, the remote, the ocean-separated mother from whom I spring. . . . I have arrived at the place I never knew but reached toward, not to know but

to dream of, over and over. . . . The compelling dream. . . . The search. . . .

Out of her deepest secret place, a street writhes. Any moment, with my escape, my parturition, that umbilical cord may leap up and wind itself about my neck. The Indian rope trick of which all travelers relate. Yet who has actually seen it, save him, perhaps, whom one finds abandoned in the gutter, strangled?

Whether or not she has squeezed me forth, I do not know. I felt no contraction, no spasm of the earth on which I stood, but without volition of my own, I find myself on that street leading away. I know that I shall never find my way to this shadowy place again, where I long, yet do not long, to abide forever. But there is one whom I will encounter somewhere along this way. She whom I hate, she who mothered—and then betrayed me. How gladly I would have betrayed her too, taken into her bed with me when she was gone to work, Rudolf, her husband, the father of her never-born children. That bed of painful love that never became the painful bed of birth, in which the cherished child was the oval of rubber stretched across the mouth of the womb, cherished, planned for, and feared because of what it might disclose to the future hopes and terrors of the loving parents.

Each morning, going to her job, she left the bed warm for Rudolf, for his further dalliance, he, the charming, willful offspring, the delicately nurtured of the worn and splendid mother Europe, whose vitality spent, her womb sunken, her fruitfulness already fitful, no longer could expend upon him a vigorous blood. His hair already in youth receded; his teeth dropped out one by one and were replaced by glittering substitutes. He, Rudolf, turned his golden smile on others and spurned me from her bed.

The street which I follow terminates abruptly; the pavement simply comes to a stop in strange twilit fields out of which the apartment house rises, the last shabby fortress of clerks and ruined profiteers. Entering, I spurn the lift that costs ten groschen and mount the stone steps worn by the daily penance of those who, each morning, go to the office in the city and, each evening, return. The empty lift eyes me bitterly, but it is not the money, the ten groschen, less than a penny in my country. Why shall I pay here for what the lusty shrieking daughter of this spent mother offers free?

I knock upon Teresa's door. The small peephole in the wood with-

draws. The evil eye looks out, each red vein a tiny river along which flows the inflaming rum that carries off her sorrows, flushes them in the ocean of her brain, her heart, her soul—the fruitless daughter, the infamous son-in-law, Rudolf.

The eye is replaced by a wet pale mouth. "Rudolf is in America."

"I know. I left him there not two weeks ago. . . . The climate kills him."

"Good!"

"Are you not going to ask me in?"

I speak to the mouth. It is not very different from the eye, no less empty.

"Teresa is at the concert. They are all at the concert. Where else would they be?"

The eye returns, retreats, slams the peephole in my face.

Down the stairs again, and again my feet take their infinitesimal share in the thin wearing of penance. Past the door of the concierge, the *Haus-Besorger,* the troubler for the house. His little eyes follow me through the glass of his cage; his little eyes go with me as I strike out alone through open country. Where is the concert?

The road leads through country of marvelous involvement. The configurations of the hills have been molded by grief. Grief has stratified the rocks; it is the primal geology of this country.

I am alone and Jack the Ripper has every chance to fall upon me—who is there now to come to my help? But the atmosphere is clear and sparse; my nerves can peer behind each tree, each flower, each blade of grass. I do not believe he is here, I do not believe he has caught up with me. Yet each blade of grass is a tiny knife flashing back that sunset color of sorrow. Then slowly the grass changes, loses its character of murderous sharpness, and begins to wave gracefully upon an imperceptible current of air. It has become peacock's feathers, long, graceful, iridescent fronds, and each one is stamped with the staring eye. Is it the eye of Teresa's mother, the eye of the troubler for the house, or the eye of God? When, in what ruin of loneliness, can one escape the eye of God? I hurry. I run. I dare not look behind, but I know that with each step the country back of me vanishes. Each inch of my way, as my latter foot rises to become the further one, vanishes. The past swallows all as it becomes, with each nibbling instant, the present.

Then, without warning, the entire landscape caves in; I stand upon the brink.

Directly before me, the earth opens into a vast amphitheater. There, within the mother, they sit and listen to the concert. Deep, deep down below their tiered earthen seats is sunk a tiny stage that, from my level, appears like a disinterred coffin. Upon this coffin, three cats make their music and everyone is enchanted. But it is a rude audience; it continues coughing and chatting through the music. "Ssh! Ssh!" some whisper. "Has *The Magic Flute* ever been more delightful!" But they are mad. This is Oscar Straus.

A powerful urge calls my attention back to myself. Glancing down, I see that from the buckle of my shoe, a wisp of that strange grass regards me. I bend and pluck it out, and slip it through my buttonhole, where the eye continues to stare as though through half-closed lids.

Teresa sees me. I point to my buttonhole and she beckons me to her. I make my way through the serried ranks of enchanted listeners.

"Sit down! Sit down!" Teresa pats the empty seat beside her. "I knew you'd come. I saved this seat for you, though everyone fussed."

Instantly, I am helpless before her omniscience and I begin to sink back into my helplessness as into a warm and soothing bath.

Then she leans forward and plucks the eye from the slitted lid of my jacket and brushes off a bit of iridescent fluff. "For heaven's sake," she scolds, "will you never learn to do anything right? That sort of thing is all right with evening clothes—but for heaven's sake, with a traveling suit! I don't know how you get on without me!"

I completely crumble. She's right. I have gotten on very badly. But now at last, everything is as it has always been. She strikes every weapon from my hand, and I am a defenseless child. How I hate her; how I need her! The eye of God lies trampled beneath my little Teresa's feet, my little Saint Teresa. She has no fear, and that makes me very fearful of her.

She bends toward my cheek to kiss me—or the air. With a shudder, I draw back. To whom, in this great multitude, does she point me out? For whomsoever Judas shall kiss shall be seized upon and led away to the last station. It is the agreed-upon betrayal.

"I am doing very well," Teresa says, as I seat myself, still trembling from her kiss. "Very, very well. . . . Yes, indeed, I can't complain."

"I am sorry to hear that." As I speak I am made aware of all the pitiful inadequacy of childish venom.

As so often with two whose only remaining intimacy is that vast ocean of mutual reproach, recrimination, bitterness, and loathing, conversation

completely dies. There is nothing to say, save to hurl the entire book, and in the interlude of silence, I take the opportunity of really looking at her.

Where, into what thin remoteness, has vanished the little apache I used to know, who bore, superimposed upon her rakishness, that unapproachable and serene dignity of Queen Nefertiti, whose likeness reposed in her bedroom before the mirror, constantly reflected, as is a lily pad upon a still water?

We were sitting in her bedroom once, waiting for Rudolf to return to her—and thus by some devious and tortuous path, to me—when she lifted her head and, turning it from side to side, said, "Do you see my profile? Is it not Egyptian? . . ."

"Why, so it is!" I cried enchanted and did not realize at the time that she was unburdening her soul to me in confession. (One never realizes when the mother lets down the bars, says to one, "Some women were never meant to marry. Some women were never meant to bear children." It is not until later, perhaps not until a beautiful evening after rain, seventeen years later, that, bending to pluck a flower, the words rise into mind, and one says, "Why, it was me. Me she murdered. Me she wished aborted.") Teresa's was a confession equally oblique, for it revealed itself later that it was not to the masters but to the slaves, whose pull with God had smitten down the first Egyptian born, that she was indirectly referring.

"What act is this?" I ask at last.

"It's the overture to the third," Teresa says. "The first act was over long ago. I scarcely recall it. Then there came a most confusing entr'acte, red, black, and brown chords. But there really were spectacular moments in the second act, you know. . . . Sometimes I was quite carried away. Though I must say a thread of hopelessness seems to have crept into the plot that certainly wasn't there after the first act. . . . Well, I daresay the third act will resolve all in a great crashing atomic chord."

"It does seem oddly somber for *The Chocolate Soldier*," I remark.

"For heaven's sake," Teresa says, "I see you're no more musical than ever, for all I tried . . . Even a fool can tell it's the sublime notes of *The Magic Flute*. . . . Will you need me to go wiping your nose after you all your life?"

But the anger is put on. Actually, she's delighted to carry always in her pocket for me the handkerchief, and loves to give my nose, each time, a little final tweak.

"I am sure it is *kitsch,*" I continue stubbornly, "because even I can hum the melody." Nevertheless, I am already swept by self-doubt. Is it *kitsch,* or has it the sublimity that she finds?

I really am bored to death with her. Death—ah, yes! I have not forgotten the kiss, the ceremony and the communion of betrayal into which she has received me. My eyes wander over the audience. All are here, Lisl, Karl, George, the beachcombers of my good old times. But for the moment I am safe. No one is going to rise and lead me away, not during the overture. . . . Everyone, in fact, is here who existed with me side by side in this city, so that it seems to me as though the time I spent here were a roof over our heads, making us all members of one family. I feel for them the peculiar loathing—rising from a purely self-imposed sense of responsibility as one surveys their failings—that one has only for one's nearest and dearest, those who have the finest opportunity to slip a little arsenic into one's morning coffee. . . . Their faces reflect the color of the earth in which they sit.

"Yes, I am doing very well," Teresa repeats. "I have a little luxury business and I expect soon to export to England and America. . . . Fortunately, a luxury business reacts like the mercury in a thermometer. The higher mounts the consuming fever of misery in the populace, the higher mounts the mercury."

"Oh, yes, Rudolf said you'd bought a shop from a Jew."

"That's right." Teresa nods her head. "He had to leave hurriedly—for Poland, I believe. So it really was a favor to him, taking it off his hands. . . . I got it quite cheap."

"And, of course, it was in a way as though the shop merely reverted to a member of the family," I observe with that peculiarly petty mother-and-daughter bickering, that pouncing upon the smallest, dreariest detail.

"What do you mean?"

"I refer to your father, who, Rudolf said, came to Vienna from Egypt, of course, via the Red Sea and Poland."

"My father died long years ago, with a black and silver crucifix between his folded hands."

"How odd to be able to cup within the hands a relative who died for one two thousand years before!"

A dismal wind begins to blow up over the concert. On the stage, the three feline musicians shrink together. The sky darkens.

"Unfortunately, your father bore certain other stigmata, carved into him at birth. Or do the authorities not examine——"

"They would have had to exhume, too. And to save the bother, they simply classified me as a 'mongrel, first class.' . . . I went along quite smoothly. . . . And after all, I am alive," Teresa says. "And after all, I am doing very well. . . . Tell me, how did you leave Rudolf?"

What can I tell her except that I no longer yearn for him to turn his glittering smile upon me? There is nothing left of him, only that golden mouth in a skull grown cavernous. To say this would be an admission that once I betrayed her in every nook and corner of my thoughts, in every fiber of my longings. . . . The wind roars. The sky is black. Fear rises in me like blood from an unstanchable wound. Among all these dead, only she is alive. She, the indestructible one, betrayed me, who sent to her, unasked, the affidavit demanding that she come to me across a continent and an ocean, demanding that she run before the flood that drowned her country, only so that she would come to me, choose my clothes, teach me to answer questions, keep the handkerchief in the pocket for me. . . . Rudolf, the willful, charming child, erased the "Frau" before her name on the affidavit of support (did I not demand, really, that she support me?) and made it his. He whose blood was pure could not afford to have it poisoned. When I saw him on the pier amidst his baggage—the signet ring, the pack of cards with which in games of chance he could do fabulous tricks—the baggage that he had brought to clothe himself against our rough winters and our torrid summers, I could have wept, knowing that there was no longer any glittering charm in him who needed. . . . Ah, Saint Teresa, why do we feel, when those we love betray themselves, that it is we who are bound in chains? . . . Simply because, once again, the mother refuses what *we* demand? Pulls the nipple from our sucking gums in which teeth have sprouted, denies return to the womb for which we have grown several sizes too large?

This insight bursts like the atomic chord in my head. How has she betrayed me? She has betrayed herself—or the long line of little sleeping fathers who wandered out of Egypt. The foundation on which I stand is swept away; the world staggers.

The wind roars. The storm rises to a wail of doom. And, in an instant, all the spectators are blown from their places like brown leaves from a winter tree. They swarm upon me. They assail my face, my lips, my breath, my very life. . . . I try to beat them off, the dry, the sere, the withered, summer's moldy leavings. Then with a convulsive shudder, the wind changes its bearings, sweeps the leaves again into the earthen cave. . . . Far below, I glimpse Teresa as she struggles, as she strives

against that overwhelming brown tide. I still see her head, then one twitching hand, then nothing. Like a great mouth swallowing, the earth closes over them again—and over her.

I turn. I run from this fearful place. . . . Night falls and, blinded, I plunge into the deeper night of the woods. Now, at last, will he set upon me? Is there no ultimate escape? . . . Crawling upon the ground, clawing my way through the underbrush, I see, as once before with Lisl, a shadowy face coming forward to meet me. I feel my life ebb in a final hemorrhage of fear. Then a last strength fills me and I hear my scream as I see the face, maniacal and fear-contorted in its familiarity. The face—my own! There in the mirror is the assassin. In the reflecting river. Then, slowly, the towers of the imaged city arrange themselves like a crown upon my head. Myself, the subject and the ruler, the assassin and the victim. . . . There is no suicide that is not murder, and no murder that is not suicide.

# CONFESSIONAL

by

Richard W. Erickson

It was cooler on the upper deck. Michael watched the people pouring down the runway, groups of two and three in the stream, talking too loudly, a shrillness in their laughter, groups and sounds merging into a noisy congestion at the narrow gangplank. The steel lip of the auto runway clattered on the deck as cars passed over it, deck hands jockeyed the last car into place, late-comers hurried down the dock, the women running awkwardly, the men striding, determined not to run.

Like a set piece on a rising stage, Seattle cut sharply into the sky behind the dull red and green docks as the ferry moved from the slip, vibrating with the sudden thrust of the propeller, the wash frothing noisily around the slip piling. Michael wondered what boat he was on. People never thought of the Sound boats by name any more. It was the two-twenty ferry, the ten-thirty or the five-forty; like streetcars, six of them, identical, efficient and ugly, dubbed with jawbreaking Indian names no one tried to pronounce or bothered to remember.

In the smoking room foursomes gathered for bridge games that would last all summer, conversations started at the lunch counter that would span the months. People turned, impersonally curious as Michael passed, making him feel, in spite of himself, as self-conscious and alien as the Indians seated on the hard benches under the skylight in stolid defiance of the unwritten law that Indians, like cars, stayed on the lower deck.

The forward deck was equally crowded. Michael turned down the companionway to the auto deck and leaned on the high rail, feeling the brisk unsteadiness of the wind blowing up Puget Sound, listening to the waves slapping the fat hull of the ferry. Narrowing his eyes against

the sun marking a broad, glaring path on the water to the jutting headland of Alar Point, he wondered what Alvin wanted. The dramatic, disembodied voice on the phone had told him nothing, but there was an urgency in it that made Michael cancel previous plans for the week end and come. Alvin's troubles, like Alvin, were apt to be a little otherworldly.

Alar Point was a good background for him; it was neither sharp enough to blur his outlines nor strong enough to reveal his weaknesses, the ritualistic gaiety of a summer colony the perfect setting for his talents. There were nice people among them, people you could name and like for particular reasons, but collectively, huddled like a flock of sheep around the ill-kept golf course on the Point, their smug group snobbery annoyed Michael. He wondered vaguely how much of his antagonism was genuine, how much of it envy. The ferry rounded the buoy off Alar Point, heeling to the sudden shift of the rudder. Michael tossed his cigarette over the side and walked back to his car.

Driving up the dock, following the slow-moving crowd, he spotted Alvin, opened the door for him to get in.

"You're looking very cheerful," said Michael, "considering your call this morning. I'd pictured impending suicide at least."

"For a while it seemed the only solution, but right after I called you, Mrs. Phelps's chauffeur appeared on the scene with the news that Madame would like to see me about doing over her dining room, and I felt very silly about the whole business."

"You might have called me back."

"I thought you'd like coming over, anyway; it's the first warm week end we've had."

The narrow, twisting Point Road skirted the golf course, green now with an occasional brown patch portending its summer garb. Michael slowed for the tree-guarded driveway leading to Alvin's place.

"Drive on to Libby's," he said, "she's expecting us."

"We've got bones to pick."

"I'll tell you later. It's nothing, really."

The Prescott place was a rambling, generous, down-at-heel house disseminating a comfortably disinterested air toward the well-kept neighboring places, making them seem a little brash and uneasy. A little as Libby, in her brogues and baggy tweed skirts surrounded by her brood, Hecky bringing up the rear, managed to do. You remembered them in that order—Libby, the kids, and Hector. They lived the year round on

the island, Hecky commuting to the law office where he unremuneratively practiced his profession in a gentlemanly manner. The town house had gone years ago. Libby stoutly maintained that they preferred wintering on the Point, and, being Libby Prescott, no one's eyebrows rose too far up their brows as she said it. There was a quiet, defensive determination about Libby that bothered you if you thought too much about it, as though the years had inured but not reconciled her to the genteel, downhill slide. There was quality in Hecky, diluted to the point of ineffectiveness, but enough. Everyone liked him, mainly, perhaps, because there was nothing to dislike and they liked Libby so much.

Libby was picking iris as they drove up. A slim, well-proportioned woman of forty or fifty, depending how she felt at the moment, her faintly lined, weathered face still handsome, the gray, almost white hair accenting the slightly regal air she emanated. There was a vigorous ease and poise about her, a warm, quick acceptance that, strong as it was, Michael didn't quite trust.

"Nice to see you," she said as they got out of the car.

"For you," said Michael, handing her a bottle of Scotch from the glove compartment.

"Still scorning my gin."

"It's your one bad habit." Her smile hardened for a moment, and Michael wished he hadn't said it. It was the sort of badinage she gave and took easily, but there was always that flick of hardness with him.

"Where's Hecky?" said Alvin.

"Hecky, my children, is with God at the moment."

Michael looked startled.

"He's organized a local Youth for Christ group and there's a meeting tonight in Seattle."

"This is all news to me," said Alvin.

"You've been so busy, dear," she said acidly, patting his cheek. Michael remembered her calling him a week or so back, hinting broadly that he should do something about Alvin and Steve Bradley, which would explain Libby's present acidity and Alvin's desperation this morning on the phone.

"You'll stay for dinner, of course," she said to Michael.

Libby still cooked on an old range, and the kitchen was pleasantly warm. She laid the iris in the sink.

"Fix a centerpiece, Alvin, while I rustle up fixings for this nectar Michael's brought."

Alvin was still busy with the iris when Michael carried the tray into the front room.

"Where are the kids?" he said.

"Out and around." Libby, squatting on the hearth, touched a match to the laid fire. "They too have been coping all week with the Youth for Christers. Ever known any?"

"I'm the original heretic."

"They ooze sweetness and light at you, and do what you will, you can't turn the damned light off. I could, I assure you, do with a good healthy wallow in the fleshpots."

"Start on this," said Michael, handing her a drink.

Over the coffee after dinner, Michael sat fingering his glass of California brandy, thinking about them; about Mary, twenty and pretty enough, but a blurred carbon copy of Libby, the imitation too patent for comfort; and Helen, just over seventeen, glibly conscious of herself as the talented, clever member of the tribe, a deliberate precocity about her that was embarrassing. Both of them quietly reared in a nice way for successful marriage, brightly sustaining, although a little grimly at times, the threadbare Prescott tradition. Libby, her hair shining under the low-hanging light, batted bright, codelike phrases to Alvin, who decoded them neatly, added a shimmering word or two to the context, and tossed them forth for general consumption. It was all very bright and amusing, but strained, perhaps because he didn't know the people under fire, or the code. It had the brittle, vapid quality of the groups on the ferry. Maybe he was jealous and not bored. They got along so well in their tight-knit little groups, warm and pleasant, asking so little, even of conversation.

Michael wondered what Bob, sitting beside him, was thinking. The darkling sport of the brood, mannerisms awkward, a little clumsy, cramped into his alloted niche as the problem child. Libby was smartly voluble about it on occasion, an accepted, evasive bewilderment in her attitude that was very convincing. He refilled Michael's glass and sipped at his own. Michael sensed his questioning, speculative look down the littered length of the table. Libby's dominant interest was the girls, who quite unfairly were the standard concern. Boys had a bad period too, and Libby in her pat bewilderment and Hecky running after God were missing something, denying Bob something he needed.

They were all missing something. Michael, a tolerated spectator, was

missing something now. He remembered a sketch he'd done of Bob one Sunday morning on the beach, a hasty water color he'd liked and resented Libby hanging unobtrusively in the guest house. Michael knew she disliked it because he hadn't done one of the girls instead, but under that dislike was a shrewd, unjust suspicion, a typical, indicative instance of the sufferance, the instinctive mistrust he'd steeled himself to face and accept, as he accepted now his subtle exclusion from the circle, as he accepted Libby's hardening smile when he stepped unwittingly over invisible demarcations. Alvin was different; there was a bland patentness about him, a labeled niche he stayed in, that made people feel easy and safe with him.

The three of them sat around the fire while the girls washed the dishes. Bob wandered aimlessly from kitchen to living room and finally settled on the sun porch with a magazine.

"I'll have to dress," said Libby.

"Big party tonight?" asked Michael.

"The usual crowd."

"Molly and Steve Bradley coming?"

"I hope not!" Alvin said.

Libby turned sharply. "Trouble in the dovecote, dear?"

"Just no doves."

"Since when is this?"

"Last night. Details are pretty grim."

"I was getting grim myself. It's high time you realized how people talk."

"I know. About the weather, and the garden, and the smart things I do in their dining rooms—to say nothing of bedrooms."

Libby went to dress.

"What happened last night?" said Michael.

"Nothing, except that Steve, looking down his nose and talking through it, informed me all was over. That is the bone you wanted to pick."

"Molly there too?"

"That's what made it so embarrassing. It's hardly the sort of thing I could discuss with her."

"Why not? She's married to him."

Molly was another surviving branch of a decaying family tree; the place was full of them. She'd worked for a long time in a specialty shop

and it was generally conceded she was tired of it when she married Steve, who had enough money and was making more. Steve was an embarrassing loose end, and their marriage, to everyone's relief, seemed to tie it all up very neatly. Michael found Molly negative and dull, but Alvin's playing around, whatever Steve's attitude about it might be, seemed particularly banal and somehow immoral to him. Steve might be fair game, but Molly wasn't. In a backhanded way, she was defenseless against Alvin. It was the spectacular, pointless sort of thing Alvin did and got away with.

"It's all very stupid, I know," said Alvin, "but apparently everyone knew and they all went out of their way to tell me they sided with Steve. I can't have him running all over the Point in his pince-nez, talking about me."

"He won't. Confine your talents to Mrs. Phelps's dining room for the moment and you'll survive." Alvin would, too. Mrs. Phelps could ignore the talk if she chose to, and the Point would follow, as always, her lead. There was something reminiscent of the lobster quadrille in the pretty end runs around convention, gasped over and accepted—as long as you swam back to shore and took your proper place for the next figure. Michael felt sorry for Molly, but it was possible Steve still looked good to her. Maybe Alvin was far less dangerous than a woman would be.

Libby's life, however half baked, tied into a basic pattern that for all the precariousness afforded resolution. He and Alvin, like exotic hybrids, faced either extinction or eventual reversion. Maybe Steve wasn't so stupid, but had smartly reverted, and Alvin's roll in the hay was merely the proving exception.

Michael found the whisky in the kitchen, fixed himself a drink, and walked out the back door and across the lawn to the sapling fence on the edge of the low bank over the water.

The air was pleasantly crisp; a thin brittle moon hung over Falcon Point and shimmered across the bay. The lights of the town-bound ferry reflected brokenly on the water, the throb of the propeller like a distant drumbeat in the still air. Stealthy puffs of wind rustled in the madronas, stirred the hemlocks to whispered activity. Leaning on the fence, sipping his drink, he heard someone walking across the lawn.

"I saw you come out," said Bob.

Michael was still thinking about Alvin and didn't answer. The throb of the ferry was still noticeable, more a recurrent pressure than an audi-

ble beat, accenting a vague, pregnant tenseness Michael sensed as Bob came up.

"Are you drunk?" said Bob quietly.

The unexpected opener pulled Michael into the present, broke the tenuous, impending mood he'd felt. "I don't think so," he said, "are you?"

"I don't know for sure. How does it feel to be drunk?"

"Usually a good feeling. How do you feel?"

"Light, very light."

"Things steady?"

"They move very slowly."

"Maybe you are drunk. How did you manage it?"

"Here and there—all afternoon."

"I didn't notice it at dinner."

"The brandy got me. It's the first time like this."

"There's always a first time." Michael set the glass on the fence rail and lit a cigarette.

"I'll take one too." Bob bent awkwardly to the match, and Michael looked at him closely. If he wasn't drunk he was well on his way. Libby would notice, if she hadn't already, and Michael didn't want to be mixed up in it. Bob picked up the glass from the fence rail and took a good swallow.

Michael took the glass from him. "Any particular reason for all this business?" he said.

"The boys had a bottle of rye in the garage this afternoon when I gassed the car. We went to Maisie Stewart's and drank it."

Michael remembered her, years ago when he had lived on the island, going to town on the boat, a brightly dressed, rather mysterious figure. He'd thought her very pretty. She must be nearly forty now and still going.

"Maisie's fun to talk to." There was a touch of swagger in Bob's tone.

"You know," said Michael after a moment, "generally speaking, it's not such a good idea to talk about things like this."

"I'm not speaking generally," Bob said, obviously pleased with himself, a slight, punctilious exaggeration in his voice.

"It's up to you, of course." Michael felt Bob waiting for something, as if there was something he should have caught and hadn't. "I take it you did more than talk at Maisie's," he said finally.

Bob nodded. Michael saw the long, dark hallway, the inevitable worn

linoleum strip down the center, the bare, drab bedroom, thought of the stilted, honeyed formality of the prostitute, the almost classic ritual of prostitution, done by daylight. It was the daylight that shocked Michael.

"Maisie still pretty?"

"I guess so. I didn't look at her much."

"Were you nervous?"

"A little."

"Everyone is the first time. Almost everyone." Again Michael felt him waiting for something, as though he'd laid the factors out and it was up to Michael to do the adding.

"I'd like to tell Libby sometime."

The casual use of the proper name jarred Michael. The little man was out of his niche all right. "I don't think she'd understand about Maisie," he said.

"I know she wouldn't. But I'd like to tell her all the same. What were you thinking about at the table tonight?"

The quick shift caught Michael off guard.

"I saw you setting them up and knocking them down," Bob said before Michael could answer.

"That's a brash statement."

"It's true, isn't it?"

"Not quite."

"What were you thinking then?"

"That's not a fair question."

"I can tell you. That's what I like about drinking, you catch things. You were thinking that Mary runs around like Libby's shadow, that Helen's a giddy little snob, and Libby's . . ."

"You can stop right there."

"I thought I was right."

Michael hesitated, and it was too late to deny it convincingly. There was something indefinite, intangible, in the conversation that made Michael want to get away. It was nothing that either of them had said; it was more a feeling of intimacy that was not dangerous in itself but dangerous because of it. Bob should be talking to Hecky, not Michael. It was Hecky's job, or if Hecky had receded too far into the background, it was Libby's. A little drunk, a little bewildered at his own brashness, Bob was dangerously full of newly sensed freedoms and powers, headed for trouble. With Libby shrewd and suspicious in the background, Michael was unwittingly headed for it, too.

"Listen," said Michael, "I don't want to take the shine off anything. Today you are a man and stuff, but don't let that fool you. Don't run around being tough on things just because you know something." Michael felt he wasn't making sense, saying what he should say and making it come out right.

"Keep going," said Bob.

"There's something I want to say about life, liberty, and the well-known pursuits, but I don't exactly know how."

"What about them?"

"It's a good line, but a hard one to follow when there's a lot of people in the way. And at nineteen there are always a lot of people in the way."

"Like Libby, for instance."

"She's got a right to be in the way. You can't push her around."

"She pushes me."

"Things aren't that simple."

"Either she's right or I am."

"That's not the point. She's concerned about you—and your life."

"My life, or the way she sees it?"

"That's a point, I'll admit."

"She likes this sort of thing," Bob made a vague inclusive gesture with his arm, "this hanging-on-the-edges business. I want to beat it, go as far as I can get, and do something, something not very polite. There's something anemic about politeness."

"There's something unnecessary about rudeness."

"That's not what I mean. Like Dickens' good people aren't alive like his funny ones are. That's the sort of politeness I mean, and the whole Point is lousy with it."

"You're drunk all right."

"It isn't just today; I've been thinking things for a long time." He looked at Michael intently. "You like me, don't you?" he said.

"Very much."

"Why?"

"A certain quality, perhaps, of that impoliteness you were talking about."

"You're impolite too—that's why Libby's scared of you."

Michael stiffened. "How do you mean?" he said guardedly.

"She's scared of me too, slapping things down before they get started or even before she knows what they are. She does the same with you."

"Libby's not scared of me—or you."

"You're always scared of what you don't know. You may think you know, but when it happens, you don't know and you're scared. Like going in the room with Maisie. Things bluff you."

"So you're calling bluffs from now on?"

Bob nodded.

"O.K. Only count me out—definitely. Remember that, and watch out something doesn't kick you in the teeth."

The warm air swept over Michael in a noisy, smothering wave as he stood in the archway to the living room, looking for Libby. There was an end run in the making, and he didn't want to be concerned with it or even see it. It was time to get out.

Restless groups merged with other groups and separated again, the dancers making a bobbing whirlpool pattern of heads in the dim, smoky light. Alvin was at the fireplace with a couple he didn't recognize, and the younger set was collected noisily around the ping-pong table on the sun porch, the sharp click of the paddles a staccato accent in the blur of voices, the radio a subdued undertone. He'd been gone longer than he thought, and with Bob primed for some trace kicking, he was worried about Libby. As Bob said, she slapped things down even before she knew what they were.

Molly Bradley wandered out of the throng, and Michael moved quickly into the dancing couples, eddied quietly out near the fireplace alcove. Libby had Bob backed into the corner, talking to him.

"What's come over you so suddenly?" she said in a low, tense voice.

"Nothing's come over me. What have I done now?"

"For one thing, you've had too much to drink, and for another, you've been gone over an hour. You might remember you're a host of sorts."

"I was only outside, talking to Michael."

"I see." The urgency went out of her voice. She was still angry, but sure of herself again. "You're not to have another drink."

"I'm not drunk."

"Don't use that tone of voice with me."

"I'm not drunk." There was a sullen defiance in his voice and Libby caught it.

"I don't think you know what you are. At the moment you're being deliberately rude and I won't have it." She clipped the words out quickly and steadily in a cold, quiet voice, her eyes hard, staring him down. She started into the living room.

"I'm going to have another drink," Bob said quietly.

She turned quickly back to him; the pull on the reins had jarred her, but she wasn't giving in. "You may do as you please, of course."

Michael moved before she turned again, worked his way into the dining room, where the punch bowl was, found it almost empty, saw Libby in the kitchen, obviously mixing another batch.

"Need some help?" he said.

"I can manage, thank you."

"Let me squeeze the limes for you."

"I said I could manage."

Michael walked over to the drainboard, where she was mixing the punch, stood deliberately in her way. "I overheard the conversation in the alcove just now and I'm very sorry we talked so long."

"It's not the talking I mind."

"I had nothing to do with his getting drunk."

She stopped what she was doing and looked at him. "What are you after with Bob?"

"Nothing."

"Something's going on."

"Just the spirit of '76 with a dash of gin thrown in. Nothing to worry about."

"I'm not at all sure of that."

"He won't fall down or anything—but if anyone goes around patting the little boy's head, they may discover a couple of horns. I found a couple myself."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Come now, Libby, he's a big boy."

"You aren't, by any chance, giving me fatherly advice?"

"No." She was laying the sarcasm on, like a piqued child not in on a secret, slapping at random, hoping to hit something, find a clue of sorts. It angered him a little, he felt his indifference wearing thin, but slapping back at her only put him out on a limb.

"You asked me what was going on," he said, "and I'm trying to tell you, that's all."

"You seem to know everything."

"Not quite."

"Well, there are a lot of things I don't know, that I don't want Bob to know, and I'd prefer you to stay away from him."

She was still slapping, deliberately trying to make it come her way.

Her assumptions were so academic they were almost impersonal. But she was bent on making them personal, not because she had a case, but because he was a handy victim for a little spleen venting.

"It might help, Libby, if you kept him away."

"Believe me, I will."

"I don't think you can—like that."

"Very clever, aren't you? But then, your sort always is."

He didn't have to take it, even from Libby. She wasn't stupid; her intelligence never got the better of her convictions, and Bob's sudden, erratic expansion shook a couple of them. She had convictions about Michael too, equally inadequate. Drinking wasn't at the bottom of the trouble, but it was a handy target, and Michael at the moment was a handier, safer one. There was something indecent about simply standing there, taking it, limb or no limb, sufferance or no sufferance. There was no sufferance, anyway, when the going got rough. It was like a pogrom.

"You're very clever yourself," he finally said, "but then—if I may quote—your sort always is." He could sense her drawing up for battle even as she winced, a battle she'd called unfairly, that he would inevitably lose. It was a slugging match, really. "You can see me, I am sure," he went on, his anger mounting, "slathering over young boys. It's a nice revolting thought, and at the moment a damned convenient one. The only thing you don't know that you should know is that juicy young things are a dime a dozen and not worth it."

"Can't help being vulgar, can you?"

"I insist on it, just as you insist on being smug and a little stupid. And keep little Lord Fauntleroy out of my way."

"I think it's quite time you left."

"Take him out of lace collars, too. As I said before, he's a big boy now."

The clock in the hall said 10:30. He'd just have time to make the 10:45. The front door slammed, startling him, breaking the cold intensity of his anger. He was a fool to let her goad him. He'd always known what she thought, accepted her unspoken mistrust as the price of sufferance. It was her vicious slashing, confident of no effective retaliation, that was indecent. It wasn't a question of right, but of the right side of the fence. He wanted to batter her smugness, bludgeon her with crude, hard, unreasoning facts that would shock and revolt her, make her revulsion chronic and enduring, as reality was chronic and enduring and crude. He understood Bob wanting to tell her about Maisie. Maisie would re-

volt her, the snide atmosphere of the garage back room would shock her, even the healthy vulgarity, the restless groping sensuality of the young would frighten her.

Michael jockeyed his car into the drive, gears grinding as he shifted impatiently, wheel spitting gravel. As he turned into the road, Alvin materialized out of the darkness and jumped on the running board. Michael stopped the car abruptly.

"Get in if you're coming with me," he said.

"Why the sudden departure?"

"Libby will explain. By the way, where have you been this last hour?"

"Steve's passed out in the guest house."

"Out of his senses or his pants?"

"Both." Alvin giggled.

It made Michael a little sick. "Better get him into his pants, quick," he said, putting the car into gear again, "because the pogrom's on and even you might not survive this one."

Michael heard the five-minute whistle as he rounded the tennis courts. He skidded badly on the sharp curve by the fifth green and slowed down. He'd make time on the main road.

He raced down the dock, horn honking, pulled up sharply at the barrier, cursing quietly and steadily at the receding ferry.

"Just too late, bud," the watchman said.

"When's the next one?"

"Midnight. Better park off the dock."

Thin, brassy music came from the tavern up the road. He turned the car and stopped for a cup of coffee. The Saturday-night dance was going strong. At one end of the lunch counter two men amiably and noisily drunk were arguing, and in the booths, mixed couples and groups ate hamburgers and slopped beer and coffee over the varnished tables, shouting inanities over the low partitions. Over the raucous smudge of sound, a trumpet blared suddenly, breaking into a rash of strident, off-pitch notes that grated on Michael's ears. He finished his coffee and went out.

He turned at the Shore Road cutoff. Driving around the island would fill in time. The moon was down, but the western sky was still luminous behind the gaunt, spired outlines of the firs, the mainland a darker definition on the darkness of the water. He was still angry, but it was a distant, dull anger, and unimportant. He had to jog himself to recall the blanketing, noxious fog of Libby's suspicion smothering him.

He'd watch his too-ready sympathy for the young, hereafter. It was an

asset in painting—you got them quicker, more completely, but it would be better, safer, to keep his sympathy in the paintbox with the rest of his tools.

He wondered about Alvin, back with Steve again, ready for the second figure of the quadrille. They'd be more careful and no one would say anything or be bothered, except, perhaps, Molly. He thought of Alvin's suède shoes, his gamy jackets, the bold red ties, and the low-collared shirts, like a uniform of sorts, a badge, a label. Michael avoided labels, avoided clandestine little passes, avoided the Steves, avoided so much, but was still suspect, more suspect because there was no badge. It wasn't enough to be aloof; you couldn't be aloof all the time, things dragged you in unawares, as Bob had dragged him in tonight, against his will.

He shifted into second and started down the hill to the dock, pulled up at the barrier at the dockhead, shut off the ignition and the lights. Bob spoke to him from the darkness.

"What are you doing here?" Michael said coldly.

"I thought you'd gone to Alvin's."

"You'd better go home."

"I had to see you. I've got to talk to you."

"There's been enough talk for one night."

"I know. Libby was pretty foul."

"She was. Very foul."

"I couldn't do anything about it."

"It's not your fault. I'm sorry about it too. You'd better go home now."

"I've got to talk to you."

There was no point taking it out on him. Michael opened the door. "Get in," he said. Bob sat tautly against the door.

"What's on your mind," said Michael, "something kick you in the teeth?"

"I guess so."

"I warned you about calling bluffs and I warned you particularly about Libby. I daresay she said plenty after I left."

"I don't believe her."

"Don't believe what?"

"Not the way she said it."

"You mean she called me, in effect, a filthy little pansy?"

"It's not true."

"Don't keep talking that way. It is true."

Bob didn't answer. Michael could hear his uneven breathing, see his profile dimly limned against the darkness, sense his bewilderment, his deliberate disbelief weakening in the face of reality. There was nothing he could do to ease Bob's immediate confusion; he resented the inevitable resolution that would come, what Bob would ultimately have to think of him. It was such a simple thing to need destroying. But there was no niche for it; the labels were wrong, and they were there.

"I just like you, that's all," Bob said quietly. "You've always made things seem important even when they weren't, I guess. It's always been like that."

"I know." It was a simple thing. "I like you too, simply that—believe me. But it won't work; there're too many things in the way—it's not worth it."

"I told Libby there was never anything . . ."

"And she wouldn't believe you. I know. She's wrong, really, but she's right not to believe you. She can't afford to believe you, and you've got to believe what she told you. It may sound crazy, but that's the way it is. It's something you can't lick."

"I see."

"I'll drive you home."

"I'll walk." He got out and shut the door slowly. A car crested the hill and turned, the headlights swinging in a wide arc. For a moment Bob stood in the hard light, an isolated figure against the darkness.

"I'm sorry," said Michael.

"That's all right."

Michael sat very still as Bob's footsteps, crunching on the gravel, faded in the darkness. They seemed to echo for a long time, until he realized it was the incoming tide washing up the stony beach under the dock.

# STALIES

by

Terry Morris

The cove had its own scallop of beach, gray sand gritted with shells and bottle slivers and threaded with lank streamers of seaweed. There were a couple of moss-grained rocks, clammy and repellent to the touch even when the sun shone full on them. Tall reeds circled the cove like a fringe of hair around a bald head and backed up to the railroad tracks, which cut a sharp, clean swath across the marshes. Three or four times a day, the railroad cars slashed along the tracks and struck fire from the rails, screaming high above the marsh music. But in a flash they were gone, and once again you could hear the shrill squeaking of the wind up the reeds and the deeper percussion of the bay water slapping the shore. The smell, like the music, was peculiar to the marshes, and when the wind was wrong, the sewage and salt pungency tickled your nose and made your eyes smart and tear. Sometimes the vapors rose thick and steaming, and in the houses beyond the tracks, windows were slammed shut, but even then the rankness slid in under the door sills and between the cracks in the plaster. But on hot summer afternoons, when the wind was stilled to a hot breath scarcely stirring the reeds, the cove was the exclusive resort of the Carney gang—FOR MEMBERS ONLY—and the rule was rigidly and sometimes strenuously enforced.

Littlejoe Carney set the standard for membership, and no matter what else you were, you had to be tough. Up and down Bayview Avenue toughness did not refer to height, weight, age, or experience, but to the ability to take punishment without wincing, to smack your way around against whatever odds, and to exhibit utter fearlessness and recklessness at all times. It was this spirit of toughness that placed the crown on

Littlejoe, and the marvel of it was that to look at him, spindly and still smooth-cheeked at fifteen, you would never believe that his exploits had taken him several times to the City Hospital for stitches and twice before the judge. But that was Littlejoe—implacable, fierce, and just enough crazy in the head to do anything on a double dare.

He sat on one of the rocks and considered the case of Buddy Pompaselli, who was off by himself at the opposite end of the beach. Like the others, Buddy was stripped to the skin, drying off in the sun. Littlejoe took his measure, from the tousled blond head down the meager torso to the legs, which were too smooth and lean to have much muscle.

Littlejoe pronounced the verdict. "I tell you, he's a punk."

Smitty yelled: "How old are you, kid? All a way up to thirteen?"

But Buddy Pompaselli paid no attention. He filtered sand through his toes and tore up a handful of reed. Then he sat down on the scratchy sand and doubled over, bringing his knees up to his chin.

"I told you to go home," Littlejoe said. "I told you to get the hell off this beach."

Buddy turned his head. "You own this cove, huh? I suppose it's your own private property."

"Yeah. It's our property. Want to make something of it?" Dutchy pulled himself up straight, and if you can imagine an ox rearing on its back legs and squaring its shoulders, you know what he looked like. Dutchy was thick of speech and even thicker in the head, but he was a willing one, ready for anything once you showed him what was wanted.

Littlejoe said quietly: "Shut up, Dutchy."

"Want to get rid of the pest, Littlejoe?" Smitty asked. He crouched on one knee beside Littlejoe. He was long and thin and his haunches were like a whippet's, flat and streamlined for action. His face was long and pointed, too, and it had an eagerness that was like a dog waiting to respond instantly and correctly to command.

But Littlejoe shook his head. He slid off the rock and flung himself on his stomach. He did not want to decide about the kid yet. He did not want to be bothered by anything just now. There were moments like these when he did not want to be bothered but wanted to let things be, when he was tired of having to make decisions. The long swim out to the breakwater and back had tired him out, and there was this weakness which he at once welcomed and feared and which made him feel curiously exposed and vulnerable. He needed to play for time until the old one-two returned to his arms and his back and his legs.

"Man, I'm hungry," he announced.

"Me, too," Dutchy said. "Tell you what would go real good. Stalies."

Smitty held the purse for the gang. "Sure," he scoffed, "you try and get 'em. Just go over to old man Hendrick and ask for stalies. With what, dope? Got any dough?"

"No. I chipped in all I had last night."

"If we only had a quarter. Or even one lousy little dime," Littlejoe muttered, and the more he thought about it, the more maddening it became. To be so broke. So Goddamn broke all the time. "Hell, we could get two or three pies on a dime. Not so stale, either. Just from yesterday."

Dutchy wet his lips. "Know something? I like stalies better than fresh. More taste to 'em."

"Maybe the kid's got some dough," Smitty said. "His folks're pretty plushy. Saw their stuff when they moved in."

Littlejoe sat up. "Hey, kid," he yelled. "C'mon over here. I want to ask you something."

Buddy Pompaselli took his time getting up. He took his time walking over, swaggering just a little and kicking pebbles ahead of him.

"You want to join up with us, huh?" Littlejoe asked. "Well, maybe you could. I don't say for sure. But maybe you could. It'll cost you, though."

Smitty nodded. "Kind of like an initiation. Got any money?"

"Just a nickel. I could get more tonight, though."

"Nuts," Littlejoe said, "they sell out on stalies by three-four o'clock." He turned his back on Buddy and yawned. "Go on and make tracks, kid."

"Listen," Buddy said, but just then his voice cracked and he had to start all over again. "Listen, why can't I join up? I had my own gang over in Northside. And they were plenty savvy and plenty tough. Plenty."

Smitty leaned against the rock and squinted up at the sun. "Like for instance?" he prompted.

"Like they stole apples off a blind man, that's for instance." Littlejoe laughed. "And once they even slipped a slug in the trolley box. Boy, were they tough!"

"That's what you think," Buddy shouted. "That's what you think. My gang could make you guys look like pikers. Like a bunch of yellow-gutted bastards!"

Littlejoe jumped to his feet as though he were a coiled spring. All his

movements were in one piece like that. He could lie around as limply as a piece of string, but all at once it was pulled taut and you even thought you heard it twang. His fingers dug into Buddy's shoulders, but Buddy only blinked once or twice and remained motionless.

"You talk tough, kid," Littlejoe said caressingly, "but can you make it stick? Around here, you can't just talk tough. You got to make it stick."

Smitty and Dutchy moved to their battle stations at either side of Littlejoe, and even though they towered above him, they looked smaller somehow perhaps because they actually felt smaller than he.

Smitty said: "Make it stick, kid."

Dutchy said: "Yeah. You do that."

The voice came from behind them and startled Littlejoe into releasing Buddy.

"You boys having trouble?" the man asked. "What do you want to fight for on a day like this? A beautiful day like this."

The man was a freight hopper and he was traveling very light. The side pockets of his leather jacket bulged a little, but that was the only baggage he had. He did not look as dirty as most freight hoppers. His voice was different, too, soft and caressing, as though he were talking to a pet dog.

"Sure," he continued. "What do you want to fight for? Swell day for swimming. Swell day for almost anything a man's got a mind to do."

Littlejoe scowled at him. "You just hop off of a train? You stopping over here?"

The man nodded and smiled pleasantly. "A way back. Near the water station. But no camping out tonight, though. Tonight I'm going to a hotel."

"Sure," Littlejoe laughed. "Which'll it be? The Ritz or the Waldorf? Listen, bud, they got no flophouses around here."

"To a man who can pay his way," the tramp said good-naturedly, "anything is possible." He fished around in his side pants pocket, and when he withdrew his hand, there was half a dollar on his open palm. He let them take a good look at it and then closed his fingers around it. "This is to spare."

"What do you mean, you got four bits to spare?" Smitty asked. "You ain't just giving it away, are you?"

Littlejoe jabbed an elbow into Smitty's ribs. "Shut up, Smitty, I'll handle this." He stepped forward a few paces. "What's the deal?"

The man kept smiling at them, and in one corner of his mouth a few drops of saliva glistened. "A small favor. Just one of you to oblige. In the bushes."

"Listen, punk," Littlejoe snarled, but he stopped short.

Dutchy blinked. "What's he want, Littlejoe? What's he want?"

"Let Littlejoe handle this," Smitty said, drawing Dutchy back. "He knows what he's doing."

"Perhaps you need a little time to think it over," the freight hopper said. "I'll wait. I know how it is. You fellows need to talk it over."

He walked slowly away from them to the other end of the beach, and as he walked, he kept tossing the half dollar up into the air, twirling it into the sunlight, and they could see it gleam as it fell. They watched until he came to the reeds, parting them with his hands and stepping inside, and then all that they could see of him was the top of his old felt hat.

"Christ," Smitty said slowly. "Jesus Christ!"

Littlejoe glared at him. "So what? So what about it?" But he looked away again and reached for his towel. He tied it around his waist so that it covered him. Silently the other boys imitated him.

"Listen," Dutchy whispered. "I don't get it."

Littlejoe grinned. "Want me to draw a picture?" His grin widened as he turned to Buddy Pompaselli, whose eyes were like two half dollars in his head. "Bet the champ of Northside here knows what it's all about. Don't you, champ?"

It hurt Buddy to swallow because ever since the freight hopper had appeared, he had been standing at rigid attention, his jaw hanging and his fists clenched at his sides.

"What do you take me for?" he managed to say at last. "Think I don't know?"

"There, you see, Dutchy? Even Buddy here knows." Littlejoe's eyes narrowed suddenly and he grabbed Buddy's arm. "Well, how about it? Here's your chance to show us how tough you are."

Buddy stiffened himself all over. With a great effort he made his voice sound unconcerned. "What's four bits? Let him keep it."

"Big shot," Littlejoe laughed. "We could clean Hendrick's out of stalies for four bits. What a spread we could have for four bits!"

Smitty said eagerly: "And how! How'd you like four bits' worth of stalies, Dutchy?"

"Jesus," Dutchy said.

"How about it, kid?" Littlejoe asked.

"Why me? Why don't we toss for it or something?"

Smitty frowned. "You want to join up all right, but are you willing to prove you got what it takes? You got to do whatever it is if it's for the gang. That's how we operate."

"I don't know, though," Littlejoe said softly. "Maybe the kid's got something there. It ain't exactly fair, you have to admit. I'll tell you what. We'll draw for it. How's that, kid?"

"That's O.K.," Buddy said.

"But get this, kid. We stand by the draw and no back talk."

"Sure. Sure."

Smitty pulled four reeds and passed them over to Littlejoe. "Short straw takes it."

"Here, kid," Littlejoe said generously. "You take first pick."

Buddy snatched at one of the straw tips held in Littlejoe's fingers and he did not look at it. Sweat dropped off his forehead and made streaks down his cheeks. He did not watch the others draw. His eyes were watching the felt hat bobbing about over the reeds, and he thought desperately that whatever it was, it couldn't kill him. To hell with it. Four bits for stalies for the gang, share and share alike, and what's the difference? Nobody'd have to know. Like the time over in Northside, the fellows fooling around a little with whatever-her-name-was. She wanted two bits for it. Well, dammit, he was getting four. He wanted to laugh and tell the fellows what a joke the whole thing was, but he knew he had to keep his mouth shut. That was the thing to do. Keep his mouth shut so tight that nothing could be forced out of him. It was like the time the doctor set his arm and the gang was outside in the waiting room listening, and he had kept his mouth shut so hard that his teeth made little bloody marks on his lips. Even the doctor patted him on the back for the way he behaved. And this was no different. Four bits for stalies and he was in for keeps.

Littlejoe matched up the straws. "Well, well, what do you know? Looks like the kid, all right."

Dutchy started to laugh, digging his toes into the sand and rocking back and forth. It made them nervous to listen to him because he sounded all choked up, as though he had a cramp and was trying to gasp himself loose from it. He was trying to say something, too, but each time he formed a word, the gasps started in again.

"You shut up, Dutchy. You shut up before I have to smack you."

Littlejoe grabbed him by the shoulders, shaking him hard, and Dutchy's big head jerked around so loosely it did not seem to be attached to his neck anywhere.

Dutchy suddenly clamped his lips together and stopped twitching. He blinked at them a few times, then turned his head away.

Littlejoe smacked his hands together. "You better get going, kid. We got to make it to Hendrick's before he gets cleaned out of stalies."

Buddy drew in his breath so sharply that his ribs stuck out plain enough to count them. He shivered a little and rubbed his hands down his arms.

"Come on, kid, get going." Smitty stooped and gathered up Buddy's shirt and pants, balled them up, and thrust them into his arms. "We'll meet over by the tracks."

Buddy shifted the clothing under one arm. "You'll wait up for me? You'll wait up for me, for sure?"

"That's what we said, wasn't it? We'll wait." Littlejoe took Smitty's arm and motioned for Dutchy to follow. "Be seeing you."

The whistle of the three-fifteen opened its throat and joined the screams from the bushes with its own, tossing the notes higher and higher until the hurtling steel dashed the echoes to pieces on the rails. And when the last car went by, the boys watched it until it was out of sight, then slowly and reluctantly turned in the direction of the bushes.

Dutchy shook himself like a dog coming out of water, and his skin was mottled to a tone somewhere between blue and mauve. He swept his hair out of his eyes and aimlessly rubbed his hands down the sides of his trousers.

"Where the hell is the kid, anyway?" he asked nervously. "It's getting late. That was the three-fifteen went by."

"Shut up, Dutchy," Smitty snapped. "Stop that damn jabbering."

"I was only saying," Dutchy protested. "You want to get them stalies, don't you?"

Littlejoe picked up a stone and hurled it across the tracks. "We'll get 'em. Only shut up."

Smitty took a deep breath as though he had been running and began to tuck his shirttails inside his pants, smoothing them down very carefully and precisely. The shirt was not entirely dried out from the sweat that had papered it to his back, but he was trembling cold and would have given everything he possessed for a blanket. He thought about a

blanket so hard that he almost got the feeling he wanted, of burrowing into something warm and dark and enveloping. He looked slantwise at Littlejoe just in time to see him pull savagely at a reed and then place the tip of it in his mouth, chewing up on it as though it were a stick of gum. Smitty watched his jaws work on the reed, and then a thing happened to him that frightened him almost as much as the screams. For he looked at Littlejoe and suddenly saw how small and weak he really was, how absolutely, one hundred percent ordinary he was, and he hated and despised him so intensely that he wanted to seize him around the waist, lift him off his feet, and dash him to pieces on the rails.

But Littlejoe spat out the reed and turned around to face him, and the desire vanished as quickly as it had come. He could see that Littlejoe was worried, too, and he had a feeling inside him like praying that they would find an answer again, the way they always did when they were in on something together.

"We better go see what happened," Littlejoe said. "We better have a look around."

Smitty nodded. He signaled to Dutchy and they beat it down to the bushes. When they were only a yard or so away from the place, they stood still and listened. There was nothing to hear except some low, snuffling sounds, the kind a bird dog makes when its nose is close to the ground. But suddenly there was a racket and they could see the old felt hat bobbing and weaving over the grass.

"Hey," Littlejoe yelled. "Hey!"

But the hat and the man under it kept moving faster and faster. Littlejoe crashed through the reeds, with Smitty and Dutchy close on his heels. They almost piled up on top of the kid, who was lying flat on the ground, and the only part of him that was moving at all were his fingers, closing and opening over a handful of grass.

Littlejoe crouched on one knee beside him. "Listen, kid, did you get the four bits?" But Buddy did not stir. He kept right on scratching the reeds and making those odd noises deep in his throat. "Listen," Littlejoe shouted, "he's getting away. I got to know. Did he give you the four bits?"

"Leave him alone," Smitty yelled. "For Chrissakes leave him alone. Let's get the bastard."

They shot off in pursuit of the man, and when they were closing in on him, he stopped and threw the half dollar high into the air, shooting

it off yards to the left of them. They stopped dead and spotted it by its gleam just before it fell.

Dutchy raced for the spot, and after a second's hesitation, Littlejoe and Smitty followed him. They were lucky to find it almost at once. Dutchy saw it first and his large hand closed over it.

"C'mon," he yelled, "what're we waiting for?"

"That's right! What're we waiting for?" Smitty made a pass at Dutchy, who tripped him up, bringing him to his knees. But even at that, he was first across the tracks and had kicked open the door of the bakery before Littlejoe and Dutchy came pounding around the corner.

# THE OTHER ONE

by

Jean Garrigue

First the room startled, then took, shaking, one's breath. It was pined, rough-hewn, somber as a rustic cathedral. Shaped like a studio, with broad north windows, the frail blue curtains cast halfway dedicated a boudoir light, most tender and clouded, to the solemnities of the brown, beamed steepnesses.

The quality of the afternoon's light was harsh. Yet within the room the light was all changed, as if the curtains had the power to alter and correct. Was it merely the fine-barred cloth of the blue curtains? Or was it the room itself, silent, soberly surrounded by the druid cedars? What was it a room for? A mere recess for contemplation? But thinking requires bareness and hardihood, an absence of distracting objects the eye may fondle. One could not overlook the grand piano, the bookcases, delphinium, and all the soft chairs.

Yet I thought again, advancing into its center after those profuse introductions at the door: to Mrs. Bastone, Dorothy's mother, and to Mrs. Hazard, her grandmother, that a certain austerity—the very celibacy of the hard, straight walls—prevented it from being a living room. Then what was it? The sea was near, but its bellow could not be heard. The adversary could be forgotten.

In this room, I preferred to think, one was upon a mountaintop.

I chose a chair in a corner of the room. Mrs. Hazard sat in front of the small table on which a Chinese teapot rested. My aunt Mimi, with whom I had come, sat next to Mrs. Hazard, and Dorothy was across from me. The only person out of line, so to speak, was Mrs. Bastone.

She sat retired into the abstract middle of the room, her hands folded in her lap.

She had stood at the door of the studio, her shoulders stooped, perhaps because she was tall, her arm extended limply. Her hand was soft, evasive, wafting into a formal clasp. She smiled and her voice was high, like the wiry melancholy of a harp. And a strange stir had come over me, for I recognized that she was exceptional. If I had been struck by her mother's well-tempered self-possession, I was as reassured by her own delicate, unformalized diffidence. She did not have the reserve of some who are shy. She was unarmed, pleased, she wanted to please; you felt at once that she was candid, simple, and mild.

An agreeable and yet a strange impression! And I will say that it was not until much later that I recognized her rather rare looks. But then, upon meeting persons, one has a great deal to handle, a very Hydra head of differences and similarities. What I was first surprised by was her remarkable look of youth. Although I also knew that she was Dorothy's mother and that Dorothy was twenty. Nevertheless, she looked immensely, fearfully young. Aside from that, her hair was of a raw, tarnished gold, a kind of verdigris, which she wore in an old-fashioned way, across the brow and knotted loosely. Her eyes brimmed with light; she looked classical, perhaps because of the contours of her face, which were oval. Her eyes had a physical innocence about them. The blue was extraordinarily "washed," all clean and unreflective.

Mrs. Hazard was tall too, but how well she had learned to carry her stomach that was perhaps overbig! And her hair, as any grandmother's should be, was oyster white. And now was she not content, I thought, as she began a very little discourse on the benefits of tea, to allow wit, the dashing self-possession of the honored old, do for her what looks had once done? At least, I thought, noting the very shrewd, detached sentiment of her eye, the lines of self-control around her decisive mouth, she is strong, a solvent ego.

For as if Aunt and I were Sunday-school children, she had already begun a grand tour of conversational possibilities. I was impressed by her verbal knack and her worldly air of knowing. She dropped her *g*'s as if it were the most educated thing to do, and gave the impression that she was doing the most complicated kind of thinking all at the same time that she was cleverly moving off from that to put forth the easy, casual observation.

Her daughter, however, sat back in her chair like another guest, and

if she was listening I could not tell, for she seemed preoccupied with something out in the cedars. The rest of us listened quite respectfully, although I could see that Aunt Mimi was getting restless and that her glance was loping uneasily around the room. It usually came back, however, to Mrs. Bastone. My aunt had been very excited about this meeting and had told me on our way through the sad shade of the evergreen families that there was something in the way Dorothy talked about her mother which convinced her that here was a remarkable case: a woman who did not go out into society. As for me, I was silently marveling at Mrs. Hazard's gay, formidable charm. During this while she was pouring the tea not a lag, a lackaday shoal, was to be had. Soon we were all lightly flying through a queer, verbal space. Except, as I have said, for Mrs. Bastone, who drooped in her chair like a fragile woman.

"And how do you like *our* sea?" Mrs. Hazard was asking me.

"Why," I answered, "I can hardly believe it's real!"

"It's realer than most things!" Mrs. Hazard replied brightly. Then, shaking her head, she added: "But it's just too much hullabaloo! I could never live right down by it."

Mrs. Bastone then agreed that she too was glad to be away from it.

"I do declare," Mrs. Hazard continued, "at noon I don't know what to make of it. Most of the time it looks like a big, brassy plate. It doesn't seem to touch anything. I can't connect it to the horizon or the shore. But what is worse anyhow," she asked of no one in particular, "than the day? The light is so flat! No shadows, no subtlety! I must say, I have always preferred the extremes!"

My aunt at that referred to Wordsworth, and Dorothy and I talked for a moment. But then the conversation changed hands, shifted courses, and, Dorothy talking across her grandmother to Aunt Mimi, Mrs. Bastone asked me if I had been this far up in Massachusetts before. I had not, and I wished to say that I admired the cliffs but not the summer hotels, pompous and shingled, usurping all the most spectacular sites, and not, above all, the "cold-waved" matrons, trussed up in sharkskins, who, taking over the little town, at home on their hotel grounds, blandly, suffocatingly ignored the rude and discomfiting sea.

Yet, falling back on the values of overenthusiasm, I replied that this part of the State was indeed wonderful. For I felt that I must do it up brown, since Dorothy had been so careful about inviting us. As I have said, her mother seldom saw anyone, and Mrs. Hazard, I gathered, reeked too much of Virginia to please the summer dwellers with their

acquired love for the high-pitched air of this virile seacoast. Perhaps the pair were supposed to be a trifle "outlandish"? This had been my amorphous impression, green as I was to the inner life of the summer-side clique. I was, after all, only staying a few weeks with my aunt, and she, although one of the original founders of Eastborough's now defunct art colony, had been away for some ten years. Besides, she claimed to be a mere hermit who saw no one, knew nobody, for weren't her best friends always, almost only, the Lake Poets and Ruskin, John Clare and Pater, and Walter de la Mare?

But then she had become interested in Dorothy, to whom she was giving music lessons. Either because Dorothy hoped to play both *May Night* and the *Prelude in C-sharp Minor* by the end of the summer, or because she was so tractable, my aunt declared herself to be quite in love with the child's "inner light" and "fine-spun responsiveness." All of which, I must say, I couldn't see. Dorothy had splendid manners and was intelligent, but she was not, I thought, the perfect youth, yearning for the unnamably beautiful. Sometimes, in fact, a peculiarly sour or rancid bitterness would twist her mouth, unagreeably inconsistent with the fairyland—as my aunt said—yellow of her hair. Yet whatever she talked about—so well bred she was—had nothing to do with that rather commonly disappointed expression. Or was she too young as yet to know the sinister delights of betrayal? So, speaking of her father, she would repeat, how many times, that she adored her stepmother and her little stepsister, who was not, however, blonde. Once in a while she talked about her grandmother, who was so clever and bright. But of her mother she had said so little that I had had nothing out of which to make an image but the rather overbearing concept of that being, perhaps as comic in more sentimental ways as her alter ego, the mother-in-law, that colossus of "love," outrageously exalted by our sentimental culture.

Not, indeed, that Mrs. Bastone looked like any kind of mother. Why, no, I thought, she looks too tender to have borne anything! Her smile, for example, it came with such quick, amazing simplicity. But as my aunt asked her some leading-out question it struck me that one might say there was a *morbidezza* about her. She was not thin, her cheeks were not hollow, she was not pale. In a way she seemed superbly serene, superbly unravaged. And yet there was this feeling that I saw her in shadows or that she was compounded of subtler elements. Now—her smile. Did it really warm her face? Could you call it a smile of the

heart? Or was it more like something almost pure of experience? Of course it is very difficult to talk about the impression which strangers make upon one, and as for this stranger . . . For what *she was* seemed invisible, while yet there was an impact upon the senses, or upon the ideas the senses breed, that was in one way almost violent!

But then my aunt had begun on her most painful favorite topic: the golden days of Eastborough when painters, actors, writers, had made it a very little Utopia. "Do you remember," she smiled at Mrs. Bastone, "the pageants on Mrs. Gavin's estate? When Willi Eckhof made the masks? Gorgon heads!" she began in an ecstasy, "naiads and fauns, satyrs and even Neptune! Why, the whole dictionary of classical mythology turned out for the occasion! With grottoes and fountains and little caves!"

"I don't remember that it was quite so fantastic as that," smiled Mrs. Hazard, "but I recall the plays that were given. O'Neill—and I do believe—Cocteau! And then suddenly," she concluded in a pathetic tone, "they all began drinking cocktails and playing bridge."

"And you? Weren't you in them?" Aunt Mimi asked Mrs. Bastone.

She flushed and then smiled, and then, as my aunt continued to look rather dizzily at her, said that they had wanted her to do something once.

"It was Venus!" Dorothy said proudly.

Mrs. Hazard said with a cool flipness: "Oh, they would have rigged her up in tarlatan. Wasn't it green, Rosemary?"

"Oh," my aunt cried, "you would have been a dream!"

Mrs. Bastone smiled, demurred, and finally said she thought Venus was cruel.

"But not the Botticelli Venus!" my aunt remonstrated, and added that she could just see Mrs. Bastone painted in that mythical costume.

Dorothy said: "Everybody's wanted to do Mother!"

"Well," declared my aunt, "I hope someone has!"

Mrs. Hazard did not take up the reins of the conversation but allowed a very cold little cloud of silence to settle down over us all while Mrs. Bastone, instead of smiling childishly, looked rather wildly for a second out into the trees. My aunt stared sharp, as if she were hunting out a nuance. Sipping the fine, penetrating tea, I thought irrelevantly that I could probably bite the thin cup in two, but Mrs. Hazard finally said then: "Oh, it was all rather primitive—or precious—I could never decide which!"

And then my aunt, rising rapturously, went over to the portrait of a child embowered on the wall. "Oh!" she cried in this continuing lull of silence: "What do I see? A cupid, or a Christ child, which?"

Dorothy laughed: "It's just me! Granny frizzed my hair for the occasion!"

Even from my distance I could see that the child wore gauze across her bosom and that her mouth was pouted, primed for a kiss.

"No doubt all of us looked like angels then," said Mrs. Hazard dryly. "It's easy to be nice when you're young."

Some of us laughed, but Mrs. Hazard ran on: "I will say that it takes us all our lives to learn what to do. I have thought how many times, on looking at Dorothy, that if I only had her youth and my experience, I could have the world! And that isn't as drear as it sounds!" she added, shaking her finger at Dorothy, who was laughing outright. "True, there's a great deal I wouldn't do that you will do. There are ways in which wisdom restricts action. But then, there would be so many ways to live to the fullest! The worst thing about life is its waste and going at a thing halfway. The Bible says something about the Lord spewing the lukewarm out of His mouth, and I have never heard a truer or more frightening thing!"

"Artists live the way you say you would have liked to live," said my aunt.

Mrs. Hazard said she hoped they did.

"But there are so many kinds of artists!" my aunt cried. "And I maintain, as I always will, that it is greatest of all to be an artist of life." And at this she smiled expressly, specifically, at Mrs. Bastone.

Mrs. Bastone cried: "Oh, Mother is that!"

"I will have no flattery!" called Mrs. Hazard, looking at my aunt, "for I have never lived gracefully. Rosemary does that for both of us."

And at this Mrs. Bastone and her mother laughed together, and I saw for the first time Mrs. Bastone in direct relation to something other than those severe trees outside the gauzed windows, and at once I decided that she must be quite happy with her mother. Naturally this pleased me, for isn't it true that we all like to appease curiosity, which often we do with the most artificial of opinions, the most disrelated of definitions, the most farfetched but localizing of concepts?

In the meantime Dorothy had passed around sandwiches and little cakes, which were hot, light, and rich, spread with wild-strawberry jam.

Aunt Mimi, clasping one between her jagged teeth, rolled her eyes

like an old soubrette and cried: "Ambrosia!" whereupon Mrs. Bastone, with a kind of delirium of naïveté, cried: "Oh, you do like them then?" Dorothy said: "Mother made them!"

Aunt Mimi bowed to Mrs. Bastone: "Then you *are* an absolute artist, and forgive me for not having said so sooner."

And then with her pleased smile, flushing a little, speaking rapidly and timorously, as if at any moment she might be left dangling midway from a sentence that could not, could not be concluded, Mrs. Bastone confessed that she liked to cook and even liked to clean and once a week, because help was scarce, might be found washing down the floors on her hands and knees because that was the only way to get them clean! If this confession might have jilted somebody's imaginary rose out of her hair, Mrs. Hazard hastened to restore the romantic eulogy by making clear that it was merely an exotic domesticism which allowed her daughter and not servants, paternalistic as old nurses, to scrub and polish this strict and classical house.

"And," she continued, "it's not all concoctions in the kitchen! Her letters are just beautiful! How many hours of mine they have blessed and consoled!" She went on to say that her daughter liked to make little drawings in gold ink on her letters—designs of birds or clouds or flowers. But it wasn't merely the décor. It was what she said too. The words she used! "I've said many times," Mrs. Hazard announced bravely, "that if she had spent the love and devotion on herself which she spent on me, she would have astonished the world!"

Mrs. Bastone, sitting helplessly in the light, looked down at her hands.

"I do believe," continued Mrs. Hazard, "that if one is blessed with a gift, one must show one's thankfulness by *using* it. One must cherish it!" She smiled with a sudden pitying, it might be, benevolence. A priest might have said with the same manner: "Love the Lord!"

"Granny's written a poem!" Dorothy said to me, adding hastily: "It was good!"

"Good?" Mrs. Hazard flourished her hand. "It wasn't fit for anyone to see!" Laughing, she added: "I don't mean it was so bad! But really," she looked at me very seriously, "I had no hope when I wrote that thing." In an impersonal voice she inserted: "It was after the death of my husband." Then, more intensely: "But I actually do believe there are things we can all say about life which none of us dare say."

My aunt, looking, I thought, a little put upon, glanced restlessly around the room, from the grand piano to the enormous fireplace, to

the wing-back chair in which Mrs. Bastone secluded herself, drinking in, as a very plant might, her own feelings or the mere vegetable light.

"Years ago when I used to spend the winters here," she said suddenly, "I knew a painter who said we are all mythological types."

"Oh, what an exaggeration!" Mrs. Hazard said, tossing her head.

"Why," my aunt answered, "that was his charm, his mad exaggeration! And I'm not so sure," she smiled at Mrs. Bastone, "that it may not be true! Oh, you've put a thought in my head!" she said to Mrs. Bastone. "I can just see you painted now! Isn't it a pity," she addressed the room, "there aren't any modern Botticellis!" Mrs. Bastone looked almost embarrassed, but then my aunt was rambling on about the winters twenty years ago and the great walks she would take on even subzero days and the stark, steel-gray sea and how the painter caught it so. She concluded: "He used to say that only in winter can you know the sea. In the summer, it is a mask and a disguise.Those were his words. A mask and a disguise."

We all had listened well, and the little silence that followed was warm and dreamy. Astonishingly enough, Mrs. Bastone broke it, but so softly that it seemed she was saying it awake in a sleep: "Once I was along the beach and found a sea gull with its foot caught in the ice."

My aunt cried, "*You* have been here? In the winters?"

Mrs. Bastone started and looked out into the cedars.

And now those favorite trees of hers looked dusty with a gray light that seemed to have fallen with Aunt's words, as if there had been evoked the winter-bound privation, ice, the packed clouds, the clashing, whanging sea. I too was surprised to learn that Mrs. Bastone had spent the winters here when even a gull, contemptuous of humans, could be helplessly trapped upon the inhuman shore. For I thought this required a hardiness, a self-command, which her—what could you call it? merely supremely gentle quietude?—did not suggest. The surprises of life! I thought headily as the blue curtains, swelling out, captured the gray air.

And then Dorothy said that we ought to have music, and all of us looked toward our pianist, Aunt Mimi. But she, with a most unprofessional coquetry, cried that she had not practiced recently. We all protested against this pedantic, this finicking scrupulousness. A little Chopin was all we wanted, something faintly melancholy and reflective to match the blue of the curtains through which the gray light was now pouring, overrunning itself the very way a wave overtakes itself in hasting to shore.

"No, no!" Aunt Mimi insisted, though we wished, all of us, to explain

that we did not want any show-off, what we wanted to do was merely to engage the soul. Music, at such moments as this, poised over twilight as the shadow of a bird is poised over earth, was to be mere feeling, a part of all the other world we usually could not gain entrance to.

Mrs. Bastone was clasping her hands together girlishly, re-echoing: "Oh, please do, please do!" But then when I had told her that I liked cats, she had looked almost as breathless and had cried: "Oh, do you? Do you?" with a wonder which did not seem repetitious. I believe it was her ardent and trembling entreaty that finally moved my over-adamant Aunt Mimi to the piano, and we all settled back in our chairs as if we all might have said: "At last!" For hadn't the afternoon been perfect? And we had all been so graceful with one another, as if none of us were governed by egotisms we could only afford to forget once in a while. But—granted the right occasion—what could not any of us be?

The piano must have been long since played out, for the treble merely quavered like a decaying spinet and some notes did not even strike, but yet in the thickening light the pines had almost turned black and the sour-sweet strains of the *Nocturne* had their dying fall: one could believe the ladders of sound. Yes, and other bars of deceitful beauty compelled. . . .

Subject to—or were we merely a part of—the deepening, the swelling gray, it enclosed, surrounded, this mute haven Rosemary Bastone had created for herself. And I thought of those evenings in the rocky cove when the laggard tide, drawing back from the shore, sucked pebbles with it, which was a fearful sound, as of dice or bones rolling. And in this same cove a white lifeboat rode empty, lolling with the waves or riding it like a swan. Oh, then, on such dark nights it could be thought that this small boat was merely the phantom of that other, that phantom ship which awaits those for whom death, though less profound, seems richer than all life.

And looking at Mrs. Bastone I saw that her eyes were semiclosed, her mouth no longer trying to please. The sweet and unformalized smile—astonishing, I supposed, because it was like the smile of a girl of fourteen—was now absent. Her mouth, now unguarded, merely looked hurt, as soft as her daughter's, but less physical. Like her face, it looked untouched. Where was life in her case? Since the slow and brutalizing effects of time—without which how could life be but powerless?—had been, by devices I could not imagine, neutralized. . . .

But at this instant my aunt, whimsically breaking off a phrase, turned

around on the piano bench, shrugging her shoulders with a supreme small disgust. "Who is Chopin?" that shrug declared as Dorothy cried: "Oh, do go on!" She smiled, however, at Mrs. Bastone as she said: "Another time and I will really play for you."

It was after this that we should have left. The proper conversational themes had been introduced, treated, and dismissed. Some of us at least had participated gratefully. My aunt had led out in a few solo oratorios. Had she not held the floor for at least fifteen minutes, discussing the wonders of the medium who had really found the way to her Unconscious? But politeness, perhaps a joy for a while, after two hours can become a task, and I was preparing to cough or move noisily, thus to suggest to my aunt's fertile intuitiveness that we ought to go when, upon looking at me, her eyes focused and then widened on what was back of me and she exclaimed, after an avid moment: "Oh, what a wonderful face. Wonderful! But whose?" She turned to Mrs. Bastone as if she would smile and smile.

I saw that in a corner stood a small table on which rested a low silver bowl filled with heliotrope clustering around a single white rose and that back of that stood a photograph. I had so sat before as to conceal it. A pity! For it deserved attention, the eyes great and dark, the forehead square, white, and solid, the black hair drawn back hard. At least what a militant idealism, forthright and stanch!

Of course, everyone had heard my aunt, but no one for a moment said anything. Mrs. Hazard remained quite expressionless, though Dorothy, I saw, was looking hastily at her mother. I wished to say: "I hope it will rain," and actually it looked as if it might and actually I sincerely wanted it to, but then Rosemary Bastone was saying easily: "Oh, that's Nina!" with such light carelessness that the question was made to appear civil.

And then my aunt left the piano bench and drew up a chair beside Mrs. Bastone and began talking to her in a low, dusky voice. Obviously Mrs. Bastone was cornered, but she did not appear to be unhappy about it. In fact, her smile had a kind of confidential eagerness. She was reclining with the credulity of a convalescent while Aunt Mimi, all bent now on fulfilling herself, was leaning forward, those curls of her green-black hair shaking briskly, an objective portent of her excitement. And Mrs. Hazard, addressing me, discussed the "powers and principalities" of music which, like the sea beneath some sunsets, she affirmed, simply made you think the earth was heaven. And she said there was so much to say about life that it was a wonder everyone wasn't a writer. Although

for herself, she said, it was painting . . . it was color. Imagine! she said. It's taken me all this while to learn that's what I've wanted to do. Of course, she added inevitably, there were my children. She looked at her daughter. And they're in the world. That's more than my paintings would have been, no doubt. It must be lovely, I said, to have them in the world.

"Oh!" she bridled, "I would not exchange, I daresay." She smiled and then looked at the two all bound together in talk. As if to herself, she asked musingly: "How can we dream of exchanging, anyhow? No one has ever been able to do it."

And then suddenly the room seemed no longer so surpassingly beautiful. Or the walls seemed too mournful now; there were too many sets of Victorian novelists!

Dorothy, Aunt Mimi, and I were waiting to go to the movies, but the first show had started and we were having to wait for the second, and the party was over and what were we still doing here! But then, to astonish us all to death, Mrs. Bastone, who had not been to a movie for three years, announced mildly that she thought she would come with us.

Mrs. Hazard, her smile twitching, started to say something and so did my aunt, but it was my aunt, her triumphal glance locking with Mrs. Hazard's, who won out.

For the next few days all my aunt could talk about was Mrs. Bastone. It was this and it was that and if she said it once she said it a dozen times: "I am a psychologist, you know," though if literally she had been it would not have justified for me the rather free way she theorized.

There is no doubt about it, of course, that Rosemary Bastone did awake theories on both our parts—theories which were, I might say, ways to abet curiosity.

Could one say that she evoked them merely because she was beautiful? I remember thinking as I sat in the movie, hearing her thin, shy, cool laughter, that a certain kind of looks may lead certain kinds of persons to such romantic interpretations as in their excess may produce very ironies, very *opéras comiques* of ironies. And that the purity of the cheek is dual, that one courts a ridiculous danger, a ridiculous deception, by assuming that beauty is an absolute, rendering visible the invisible, the only one that may freely pass in and out of the camps of those enemies so envious of one another: imagination and reality.

And yet, I thought, we do believe that the beautiful may raise the

power of *what is* or *what might be,* and I thought also that in such cases the contest becomes one between ourselves and the nature of the beautiful. And we always wish the contest to be uneven. We wish to overcharge, to overload what could be, for all we have found out, neither tragic nor noble. Yes, we wish to overload with powerful subtleties that which has caused the "factory" of the senses to begin its strange labor. Then, with naïve esteem, we assume that beauty is power, imagining all its liberties, its continents, its ships, its islands.

But more: the beautiful must be accompanied by the unknown, and this unknown we must adjudge to be profound, suggesting ineradicable conflicts, deep schisms made by violence upon resistance. The unknown gives to the beautiful terror, a terror fearfully enticing—in which to lose ourselves!

In the case of Rosemary Bastone she was so quiet and protected that it seemed as if she ought to be, and then I was puzzled. Why should she be? What had occurred that it was necessary? And was it therein that the profound resided?

But for my aunt it was all another matter. She considered it quite a story, a story! "Ah," she said, "if you had only heard her talk when we were alone!" I said I was sorry I had not.

I had had no chance, which I did not add. For my aunt had almost carried the poor woman off that evening when we set out for the movies. She had seized her by the arm, plunged into a low, intimate little conversation, and set a pace, rather fast and clipped, which warned me to amble behind with Dorothy good-humoredly and obediently.

"Well!" my aunt said proudly, "we talked! About Ruskin and Oscar Wilde! She came to life!" I said I thought she had been quite alive at the tea. My aunt asked me where were my eyes, she hardly said a word. "Neither did I," I said, "we're probably both shy." My aunt said sweepingly: "You're not and she's——" But she did not then say the word that would tell what Mrs. Bastone was.

In the meantime I was out most of the time, swimming or climbing the rocks that lay along the sea's distinguished edges like stranded whales. In the evenings when we would not walk into town for ice cream, Aunt Mimi would play the piano, and this she did rather vehemently, her erotic feeling for rhythm accentuated so that the musical line dipped and swayed like a rope in air. I happen to know that during this happy lull my aunt saw Mrs. Bastone—both times it was accidental—once along the cliffs at sunset and another time in the little cove where

the lifeboat rode. She continued to talk about her, wondering why so lovely a woman—made for love! she declared—lived the way she did. I replied that we are all made for love, but no, she insisted on thinking that the comely are especially designed and equipped for it, that their career was really and especially one of awaking desire. "The desire," I said, "of fair forms which then creates fair thoughts?" But she only replied that beauty should be seen, it should be felt by many! "But she is so shy!" my aunt added with bafflement. "And yet do you know," she smiled, "I think she likes me." She went on to say that Mrs. Bastone acted as if she were always about to say something really about herself, but then would be checked. I said: "Do people usually talk about themselves right away?" "Why, yes," she said, "if they have nothing to conceal."

"Of course," she added, "I just saw her for a minute both times."

"Did you ask her down?" I inquired spitefully.

"Oh, yes," my aunt confessed, "but I don't know. She wants to be friendly, but I think she's afraid to." Then she turned to me. "That's it. I do think she's *afraid*." But then she smiled with a kind of private glee. "What *did* you talk about?" I asked. "Well," she said, "she likes Epictetus." "You probably did most of the talking!" I laughed. My aunt said: "I think she is unhappy and wants to be happy again and doesn't know how to go about it. After all," she added, "she *is* a recluse." Well, lots of people are, in one way or another, I thought.

Since during this while my aunt went about looking rather addled, her eyes narrowed like a sportsman's as if upon some horizon not visible to me, she had located an enormous view, and since she was always talking about Mrs. Bastone, I began to wonder if she had not found something on which to exercise her imagination. That would be, at her age, a most remarkable distraction. For she was fifty-six, a widow, and childless, possessed of an income which allowed her to use her piano teaching as merely a way to keep "in touch," or socially entertained. She had always said she did not like people her own age, considering their minds to be gristly and their emotions all gone. The heart, she said, could wrinkle too. So naturally she only taught the young. She favored, of course, boys, but most of them preferred the saxophone. However, occasionally there would be some young man who had the delicate feelings of a Debussy. Healthy, idle, and perhaps greedy, Aunt Mimi lived, I had recently concluded, with the bustle, the frenetic deportment, of those who suspect that they are about to be overtaken by an asphyxiating boredom.

She had, of course, her old palace guard, the poets. But I fear she con-

sidered literature useful only because it told her how to live life. Besides, those poets were by now predictable! They talked and you couldn't talk back. They always had the final floor in heaven. In the meantime, here she was, stocked with all their fine insights which ought to be applied. Young boys were headstrong, able-bodied for their own life. Mrs. Bastone was not. And one word was found for her: she was a mimosa.

At the end of the week Dorothy came for her music lesson and after it was over stayed on to have lemonade with us under the cherry tree. My aunt at this juncture looked absolutely dazzled, and if I hadn't known better I would have thought she had been teaing secretly on gin. Her curls were pushed awry. She held her head like an animal about to attack. She looked poisoned with joy. I noticed that she was cherishing something in her lap, but I could not see what it was, for her hands clasped over it tightly.

Dorothy said, upon my inquiry, that her mother was well and that she still talked of the afternoon which she had enjoyed so much, and the movie too.

"Perhaps we have won her over to the cinema!" Aunt Mimi said.

"I don't know," said Dorothy. "She was quite tired afterwards."

"Imagine!" said Aunt to me: "the first movie in three years!"

"I wish it had been a better one," I laughed.

"It would be interesting," my aunt surmised, "to know just what it was, the turn of mind—to gain a view into her psychological and thinking processes. I *am* a psychologist!" she added. "I love to study people. In fact, what is more interesting? Now your mother: do you imagine she had really been building up to this or is it possible that just suddenly she wanted to go and did?"

"Oh, Mother doesn't like movies. She thinks they're a waste of time," Dorothy said, looking bored.

"Oh, that!" my aunt cried. "A rationalization! Do you think that really gets to it? We always like or dislike things for reasons we will never admit to ourselves."

Since neither of us answered, Aunt Mimi's cliché fell into a little uneasy abyss.

But after a moment she began again: "I think your mother's self-reliance is very admirable. The way she spends her life, reading and thinking. So many people couldn't stand it, you know. They would get bored and lonely. Especially when I think of her living here in the winters! That was really bold!"

Dorothy looked uneasily at my aunt and then looked away.

"But really," my aunt continued, "to be alone then! Why, it's a desert! You know, on your road you would have to use snowshoes most of the time. Anyone alone—oh, it would be something out of Jack London."

"Oh, Mother wasn't!" Dorothy cried in hasty defense.

"Well!" cried my aunt, "I am glad, I must say, to hear that. It makes her less heroic but more human!"

Dorothy still looked away, but with a kind of hunted, self-conscious misery, and my aunt, who liked to demand the undiverted gaze, and who in fact was never happy unless at the same time that she was talking she was also looking, eying her listener into a very kind of hypnosis, restlessly studied the girl's profile.

And Dorothy, at last turning, said as if she had known all the while that she would have to say it: "Miss Lehman stayed with Mother."

"Miss Lehman—Lehman?"

"You saw her picture!" said Dorothy.

"Oh!" my aunt exploded, sitting back in her chair. And then a little drunkenly she went on: "That strong, daring spirit! Do you know what flashed through my mind when I saw her picture the other day? That here was the long-lost face of the *Winged Victory!* But what was she like? Oh, there is someone I should like to know!"

"I didn't know her well," said Dorothy. "I was away at school then. But she was very nice," she added hastily. As if inadvertently she added: "She loved to walk!" but then flushed and looked down at the grass.

"No doubt a creative person!" said Aunt Mimi. "Oh, yes, she would have to be."

"A sculptor," answered Dorothy. But then, as if embarrassed for her shortness, she went on uneasily: "She did a head of Mother and wanted to do me, but I never had the time."

"A head of your mother!" my aunt breathed. "That would be something to see."

"It isn't here," said Dorothy. "It was exhibited in New York and maybe someone bought it."

"I would hate to think of that!" my aunt cried. "Such a thing should not be had by anyone but her or your family."

"Granny didn't like it," Dorothy said angrily, "and neither did I. It made Mother something different. Mother isn't like that."

"Oh, we are always misunderstanding," my aunt said benignly. "How does anyone know who anyone is? Especially your mother."

"There's nothing complicated about Mother. People are always trying to make her out to be something else. I mean, she's enough, just as she is."

A rougelike stain had come into her cheeks and her light, long brows were drawn densely together. But only, after all, for a second. Then she arranged to look at her watch and to cry: "Oh! I'm late!" and, with various attempts to recover the usual charm of her social dealings, left.

We continued to sit under the cherry tree as Dorothy, riding off on her bicycle, waved at us. When she had disappeared under the last of the elms, my aunt turned to me, exclaiming: "Oh, isn't it a story, a story!"

I merely looked at her.

"Oh, quite a story! And so clear. Quite typical, I must say."

"Typical?" I asked.

"Of the mother, the mother! That sly old casuist!"

I frowned in bewilderment.

"Oh, don't you see, don't you see? She's very charming, but they always are!"

I agreed that Mrs. Hazard was certainly charming.

"But don't be taken in by it!" she amended. "Anyone can be charming when they have the right of way. Why, Rosemary Bastone can hardly call her soul her own."

"Why, what do you mean?" I said, astonished.

"Oh," she cried, "I see it all now!"

But before I could reply she cried: "Look!" and plumped into my hands what obviously she must have been nursing in her lap through the conversation with Dorothy.

I saw a beautiful little tooled-leather copy of the *Discourses* of Epictetus.

"I told you we discussed him!" she said. "He is like an old Roman god to her!"

Leafing through it, I saw that there were a few passages underscored and that one or two of those so marked had exclamation marks or little stars in the margin.

"She sent it by Dorothy!" my aunt cried emotionally. "Isn't it lovely of her?"

"Indeed," I answered sadly as I read: *Does it seem so small and worthless a thing to be good and happy?*

"We talked about him and now she makes him mine!" my aunt went on.

Turning through the pages I read again: *Do you also remind yourself*

*in like manner that he whom you love is mortal, and that what you love is nothing of your own.*

"Epictetus, born a slave!" she said, tapping the book as I handed it back to her.

Then, clasping it again in her hands, she said: "But imagine! Giving this to me because I said I admired him!"

As if now upon the horizon she saw and others did not there loomed a wondrous secret, her eyes dilated and her mouth was occupied by the same kind of redundant smile I had seen at the tea.

"And didn't she come to the movie? After all, didn't she? Oh, it proves something! It proves she is lonely."

I did not answer.

"Yes," she continued, "she is lonely. Her soul is crying out, yearning, ailing, for friends and companionship, for understanding."

She told me then that she had heard—I suppose it was from an "old settler"—that Mrs. Bastone *had* appeared in a pageant, costumed as Daphne, her hair long in the days when everyone's was short.

"But why didn't she say so? What do you make of it? Unless"—and she looked sharp at me—"her mother didn't approve. Oh, I tell you," she went on, "it's the mother!"

I said: "I should imagine the fault is in Mrs. Bastone and not her mother."

She seemed electrified by my statement and turned to me abruptly. "Oh, there, you are wrong. You show that you are young, that you do not understand the violence of human nature."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"People," she said, "are more terrible than you think. And I for one," she waved her hand, "do not believe the soul is free."

"Or at least," she added, "some souls."

I realized that she had found an idea which was agreeable to her, which pleased her, and that, having found it, she would begin to use it, for she suddenly said with the italics of melodrama: "My dear, it is power. It is the wicked complex of power. That is what is ruining Mrs. Hazard and her daughter."

"Oh!" I exclaimed.

"My dear!" she cried, "*she* saw to it that Nina Lehman left."

"That's just crazy," I said.

She declared triumphantly: "Do you think anyone would *voluntarily* leave Rosemary Bastone?"

I said, after all, her husband had.

"Oh, that! How do we know what happened there? How do we? It fits in just as well! She just couldn't have him owning her daughter! Why, I've heard they were only married two years and he was very handsome."

I got up and started for the house.

"She's found something she can't handle, that's what it is!" my aunt called after me.

I stopped and said not without bitterness: "Well, you make it a good story."

For a moment Aunt Mimi looked ruffled, but then she proceeded with an almost ineffable dignity: "My dear, I am interested in this as I would be in any human dilemma. For it is a dilemma as I see it and it touches my heart. I should like to do something."

"Evidently Mrs. Bastone has her dream," I said, frightened.

"She has Epictetus—a poor consolation for not dreaming! But now—I have Epictetus!" Aunt Mimi cried, smiling.

I must say that as I retreated from this scene of cold, muscular dissection I retreated rather dizzily, alarmed, astonished, mystified, and excited by my aunt's talk, which I could only think of as spectacularly irrational.

And how the passion had burst upon her I could not decide or understand, although from then on I saw her carrying the *Discourses* around with her as if it were a prayerbook and I often saw her, too, at her writing table, pen poised in hand, as she stared out into her garden of phlox and primroses, or, pen poised over paper, as she was distilling, I suppose, the perfumed insight, or racking the silk phrase.

I could also see that as the days went by her theories too were gaining in density, texture, and cubic length. Her industrious theories! Until I wondered which was web and which spider.

You might easily say that she was by now all geared for, aquest on the scent, lavished for her purpose. She had two goals: Mrs. Hazard's influence was to be subtly warred against, discreetly nullified (or was I going too far in my own conjectures, or did my aunt think that she needed to be subtle and discreet?), and the problem of who Miss Lehman was was to be understood. About the latter I was positively *not* conjecturing. My aunt was charmed by the thought of having found the long-lost face of the *Winged Victory*.

Altogether it was as if she had found herself a play in which she might at last be the star actor, for only by her ingenuity—though I would call it Machiavellian—could Mrs. Bastone be rescued from the benevolent vil-

lainess all decked out and wreathed around with the calamitous filaments of the silver cord.

Well! I could understand how many of us play theoretical games with human beings and that in many cases it is all fair and aboveboard. But I considered that in this case, in the case of one like Mrs. Bastone, so enigmatically withdrawn that she took for her "consolation" a philosophy so prudently prepared for misfortune and so indifferent to all but the universal, I considered that in such a case the "game" might just possibly have rather mortal consequences.

I wondered indeed what Mrs. Hazard might think—I judged her to be a woman of action—if she should learn of this little mesh of hypotheses in which my aunt was already caught—on her own hooks! yes, such as that my aunt was crazily thinking to devise a way by which to rescue spiritually Mrs. Bastone! What would she, with all her solid hold on life, think of such a mad-spun threat? But then, did she just possibly know what influences her daughter cast? That is to say, one can take for granted even the exceptional.

We are irrational. And I saw that for my aunt the issue was gloriously philosophical. Rosemary Bastone, that is, must be given a chance to know life for herself. And any awards accruing (although, of course, all motives were disinterested) would be exotic and, if my aunt succeeded, lasting. They would be all the undying love of Rosemary Bastone. For anything that Rosemary Bastone gave would be undying.

An ingenuous fable!

In the middle of the following week Rosemary Bastone appeared one evening at my aunt's "shack." She was dressed in white and looked, as my aunt would have loved to have said, spectral. Either the light of the evening or the dress made her hair seem more gold. As I had noticed before, when she moved it was rapid, sudden, untenacious. You did not want to call her movements jerky or disconnected. Yet they were not limpid, spacious, and curved, nor deliberate and serene, as you might expect from her attitude of sweet, vague passivity. Perhaps in a way they seemed premeditated, as if for one, it struck me again, so far inland, any action at all, no matter how small, required foresight and planning.

When I told her that my aunt was not in at the moment, she looked so disappointed that I hastened to assure her that I expected her back right away. We waited, then, under the cherry tree. I must say I was so startled and so surprised that I could not for several moments think of anything

to say. My aunt called her summer cottage a shack, and laughingly I had said to her at dinnertime, "It's not a shack; it's a hut!" whereupon she had said to me: "A hut to some, a castle to me." The phrase was now going through my head, and in my suppressed excitement I wanted to say that aloud. Otherwise I was indeed at a loss. Here was the figure of my aunt's conjecture and my sometime own conjectures! Appallingly real! Real enough, indeed, to humble anyone's curiosity! But real enough, too, to incite it! Why had she come? To think that she, who never went anywhere, so they said . . . And in spite of myself I found I was looking at her with some overedge of curiosity—yes, just to see if she were the same! I found to my relief that she was, that my aunt's meddlesome theories had not bred hallucinations.

Thank heavens she had begun the conversation! She was saying the evening was lovely, that Dorothy was attending a wedding in Boston, and that her mother had gone to North Haven unexpectedly for the day and she had been alone and had gone for a walk along the Narrow Way and hadn't expected to come so far. But she was just led on, she said, smiling. And she said had I seen the sunset, the sea was all pastel and the foam was almost green and there was just one thin long gray cloud in the west that looked like a brush stroke in a Chinese painting. All of this she said as if astonishment were her stock in trade. Her eyes were even more clear than they had been on the day of the tea, as if there could be a fanaticism not of expression, but of light, or as if health could be a kind of madness of glint and translucence and clarity.

Overcoming my own social perturbation and able now to respond to her presence more objectively, I saw that there was a delicate difference, that she was keyed up by her little adventure or by her—perhaps she would call it—boldness. That, at least, she was less retiring, or that she seemed to be more free—or was her heart just beating irregularly, as mine was? For perhaps I, too, was fearfully inquisitive and wanted to ask her if she were happy and why it was that she was secluded when, of course, I knew that we all suffer from our fate and we could all be good but instead are merely sad and how could we become what we ought to be and what so nearly always prevented it?

But because she had ended her own little piece and it was my turn now, I had to say—for what else could I think to say?—that I had been reading the *Discourses* with my aunt. It was a direct lie. Aunt Mimi would not wish to share them with me!

Then she said: "Oh, isn't he wonderful?"

I wanted to agree with her, but then I did not like Epictetus! I did not want to accept such statements as that the body must be separated from the spirit so that the period of the universe may be completed. But I did not want to disagree, and so I finally said: "Sometimes he makes me sad."

"Sad?" She seemed surprised.

"I guess," I said, "it's his resignation," whereas I was really thinking that it was a pity she was so uncorrupted by her looks, for they were the kind to attract those who might be revengeful if they could not succeed in discovering her—her—secrets? Oh, yes, I thought, she must keep secrets.

She put her head back against the chair and looked up at the cherry leaves bent now by a sudden little wind.

"But," she said, halted, smiled at me, and finally said with an air of daring: "There is such a, a grandeur."

After a pause I said: "Morally? A moral grandeur?"

She nodded delightedly. Both of us then watched a martin fly into his house in the next-door tree. The vague sounds of evening on the little wind rained down on us. There were odors of green. She was smiling into the air.

"But he still makes me sad," I said.

As if she had been thinking very hard, she exclaimed, "Oh, but to me!" breathlessly and paused—for that seemed by now to be her manner of speaking, in little ejaculations of awe that required a space between in which she might gain more words and time—"oh, but to me," she repeated, "it is like the ocean. I mean . . . oh, I was thinking tonight . . . that there are times . . . I mean, in the twilight . . . or when the moon is out. Oh," she pled charmingly, "do you know what I mean?"

I thought that her appeal to my sympathy was very winning and said rather eagerly: "I think I do! You mean . . ."

"Oh," she pled, "the moon sees us . . . in our place—and so does he!"

We smiled together at one another, and suddenly she said quickly: "Oh, do you know . . . when it's like that . . . I don't want to be myself! I don't want to be anything! I just want to be . . ." Eagerly she looked for my reaffirming nod, and laughingly I said: "You just want to be a moonbeam?"

"Oh, yes!" she said, laughed too, and then threw back her head and sighed, as if she were suddenly tired. But I saw that, still looking straight into the leaves, she was smiling, softly and quietly, and the thought came over me suddenly that she was like a poem, but an unfinished one, and

that her youth seemed strange, like a mermaid's. But then, who could deny this queer unreality? There is a charm in the untrue.

But Aunt Mimi was charging down the lawn, having already spied Mrs. Bastone, to whom she was waving frantically. As she came up to us I saw that she was astonished by her triumph but perhaps angry too that it was not more nearly perfect. She smiled at her guest and glanced at me, I thought, with short shrift. Her irritation that I was there should have banished me, but did not. We all remained under the tree in our summer chairs as the leaves gathered up the twilight.

"I came to thank you for your letter," Rosemary Bastone said naïvely.

"Oh, my dear! Thank Epictetus!"

"Oh! Catherine and I have been discussing him, and she finds him too —but," she smiled at me, "please express it yourself. You'll do much better."

"Oh—youth, youth!" Aunt Mimi waved me aside. "And how have you been? I fear we bored you the other evening!"

"Oh, you mustn't say that!" she cried. "It was"—she smiled—"memorable."

"I've thought about everything!" my aunt cried, "our conversation, your lovely studio, even the rose and heliotrope!" Mrs. Bastone smiled softly while my aunt said: "Oh, but such things are rare. And I am alone too. And whatever I experience touches me deeply."

I thought: dear aunt! don't overdo it! and my heart quickened. For Mrs. Bastone looked really terribly pleased to see my aunt, and I enviously wondered for a moment what my aunt had said to her on those three occasions when they were "alone" that had so won her. For obviously she was won. Aunt Mimi had made a new friend, she who pretended not to care for merely human, merely personal connections! And Mrs. Bastone had made a friend too, she who had retired from all society, or so they said, simply because she did not need it! But apparently she did! Or most apparently she wanted it in this case, for here she was, looking already more easy and relaxed and looking, too, rather flushed and high-spirited, merely by the praise? At least there was a new difference in her again. She was gayer with Aunt Mimi than she had been with me.

It was the two who talked, and if I had been less stubborn I surely would have invented some appointment on the beach with a sea gull. Aunt Mimi was asking Mrs. Bastone if she ever came to New York in the winters, and Mrs. Bastone said they hadn't of recent years but they would like to, and Aunt Mimi said oh, you and I must have tea overlook-

ing Central Park some snowy day! But Mrs. Bastone said winter was so lovely in Virginia, a kind of blue raininess and ground pine everywhere, and Aunt Mimi said but the theater, and concerts, museums! and Mrs. Bastone said New York *was* exciting, that was true, and then Aunt Mimi, getting more overcome as she went along, said, "Oh, my dear, I really feel you live for the experience of beauty!" But then Mrs. Bastone laughed modestly and said: "I? I just live!" and my aunt said, "That is the best way: just to live! then everything comes!" But Mrs. Bastone looked vague at that and, because my aunt was waiting, said, "Oh, really, I wouldn't know," and then poor aunt, never a patient woman, and never one fearful of action, who claimed that the mere sea air could intoxicate her, intoned: "Some people are like harps. They blow as sweetly with the north wind as with the west wind—and that is you!" Again Mrs. Bastone laughed and said: "Oh, you ought to ask Mother! She'll tell you how cross I can be!" But at that my aunt turned very cold and asked: "Do you think your mother knows?" Mrs. Bastone answered simply: "Why, better than anyone!" My aunt Mimi asked after a moment, very deliberately: "Better than your friend?" And Mrs. Bastone said with bafflement: "My friend?" And my aunt replied with elaborate grace: "Oh, yes, your friend. I mean Miss Lehman. Dorothy was mentioning her!" And Mrs. Bastone said, "Oh!" and my aunt said: "What lovely times you must have had! Dorothy said she stayed with you through the winters!" Mrs. Bastone then said it was just one winter. And some of her shy coquetry of merriment had gone. She still looked baffled and she looked too as if she didn't want anything more to be said. "Oh, we just happened to talk about her," my aunt added, "but how I should like to meet her!" And Mrs. Bastone smiled vaguely, but then looked around from side to side like a wounded bird who finds that it has, in attempting to escape, flown blindly into a net.

And then my aunt said lightly: "My dear! I know a secret!"

Then Mrs. Bastone looked happy again and said she loved secrets and she must tell her! "Even if it's about you?" my aunt laughed. "I warn you it might be!" "Something I don't know?" Mrs. Bastone continued with the same pleasure. "Otherwise it couldn't be a secret, could it?" The two looked delightedly at one another, and Mrs. Bastone cried, "Oh, please tell me!" Then my aunt, leaning forward in her chair, said: "Why, Dorothy told me there is a wonderful head of you which your friend did!" And Mrs. Bastone at that looked frightfully disappointed and stared straight ahead, her lips slightly parted.

"Oh, it proves something!" my aunt went on, all innocent—or was she? —in her egotism, of Mrs. Bastone's sad staring ahead. "I knew someone had to do you! I just knew you couldn't have lived here all this while without some artist portraying you! Oh, after all, artists know! Nothing is hidden from them! They understand!"

"Understand?" Mrs. Bastone helplessly said.

"They understand why we live the way we do." She paused. "Why you live the way you do. Artists are liberated! And what baffles others, they *know.*"

"No, no! They don't know!" The words seemed to have flashed from Mrs. Bastone like a quick, truncated little electrical storm.

My aunt looked amazed and said, "But why not?"

"Aunt Mimi," I said, "why don't you play for us? It's a perfect evening for music. Mrs. Bastone and I were just saying how beautiful the evening was."

Mrs. Bastone unfolded her hands, which she had clasped tightly together, and drew back her gaze from that peculiar nothingness she must have been looking into.

"Oh, later, later!" my aunt said, not looking at me, and then began chanting: *"Such will I show myself to you, faithful, modest, noble, free from perturbation. What, and immortal too, except from old age, and from sickness? No, but dying as becomes a god, sickening as becomes a god."*

Her voice had roughened like an old actress', and I stared with amazement, for I recognized the passage from Epictetus. It was one of those underlined, exclaimed, and starred.

And alas! the lovely evening! What was becoming of it? For the openness of Mrs. Bastone's look was undergoing a strange and subtle change. The childish rapture was being vanquished. Her face had whitened. Some emotion seemed suddenly to define the nostril.

She said then: "That was her favorite passage."

My aunt breathed in quickly.

"She gave the book to me."

My aunt wet her lips. "And that is one reason why you love him so?" Overwhelmed, but visibly rising against it, she almost whispered: "Friends! What influence is more far-reaching, more enveloping, intertwining?"

Since Mrs. Bastone did not answer this, she cried, as if she were striking out for any effect: "Oh, where is she now? I feel you are hiding away

something too wonderful to be hidden! She ought to be here, sculpting the rocks!" She laughed. And as Mrs. Bastone still did not answer, she repeated: "Where is she? Where is she now?"

"I shall never see her again," Mrs. Bastone said in a high, chill voice.

My aunt said, "Fate chooses our friends for us. We cannot give them up."

Mrs. Bastone turned as if she had been struck. "You don't know!" she said.

"Why, I think I do, I think I do!"

Mrs. Bastone, starting as if she would get up, and then sinking back in her chair, said with a violent softness: "You don't, you don't! You don't know what she did!"

My aunt, who had in all our conversations of the last week or so spoken of Mrs. Bastone as Rosemary, now forgot herself and said: "What, Rosemary? What did she do?"

"Oh, I must go," said Rosemary.

My aunt, half devoured, looked up from beneath her curls, and they shook as her head at irregular moments jerked with a complication of the merest nervous disorder. "But I am going to play for you!" she begged, and then pled softly: "Oh, my dear, I do understand! the thoughts too deep for tears!" As if burning with the imaginary, she went on: "For what I live for is the moment too. And when it comes—it is worth all our waiting. It is like a clear bell. A very summons—to our higher selves!"

But Mrs. Bastone had spasmodically burst into a wild little energy of tears.

"Why, my dear!" My aunt was trembling too. The light was ebbing now so that Mrs. Bastone's white dress was beginning to look like a mist around her. "My dear!" And then she said: "Oh, Rosemary, what is it? Have I hurt you? You must tell me! I don't want to hurt you!"

For a moment it seemed that the inundating sympathy in Aunt Mimi's voice would quite subject Mrs. Bastone, but finally at last she gained control of her soft, breathless weeping, tears which were, I thought, murderous on my aunt's part, although Mrs. Bastone's weeping was not bitter, but more like the weeping we do over an unbearably sad line of music.

And my aunt began again: "Oh, my dear, you will forgive me if I have said anything to hurt you. But it's just that I think we see things alike, and that, I repeat, is so rare! And I wished to see what Miss Lehman had done merely because—well——"

Mrs. Bastone flung up her head and said, interrupting my aunt, "I have it!"

My aunt gasped.

"No one knows."

"Oh, Rosemary!" And then: "You mean you have it here?"

"Yes."

Finally my aunt said: "But Dorothy——"

"She hasn't seen this. Not this. Not this!"

"But, Rosemary," my aunt said, "you must let me! You must!"

Mrs. Bastone said fiercely and softly: "If you only knew!"

A strange little debate then went on, my aunt pleading shamelessly and Mrs. Bastone pleading against her, shaking her head, repeating no, no. All her excited air, her high spirits, had so long since disappeared that I could hardly believe she had come glad and adventurous to my aunt's place just a little while ago, an hour or so. Now she was sitting there, her eyes great with light, her face suddenly marked, intent, the strange youth gone and nothing but pain replacing it.

She pled against my aunt, but it seemed she was pleading against herself too and that actually she really wanted my aunt to see what Miss Lehman had done, and when finally, with the violence of the weak, she arose, saying: "Then it has to be now! You must come to the house! Both of you! Mother is away!" we too were unamazed. But then sometimes action is its own amazement, its own reaction and philosophy, and as we trod the starlight in a closed, hypnotic silence, it did seem the most all-sufficing kind of truth. A mist was just beginning to blow in from the sea which I thought would soon envelop us all. Then Mrs. Bastone might feel anew her hopeless desire to enter the particles of the universe. We did not talk, nor did my aunt take Mrs. Bastone's arm. Mrs. Bastone, in fact, led the way. We passed a tree, dead of all but its vines, and as we turned up the road to her place a cat ran in front of us. It was the cold scent of the pines surrounding her house that struck my senses awake with power. Then for a moment I was afraid. But Mrs. Bastone had gone on ahead to turn on the lights, and we were in the first of the chaste, remote rooms of the big, classical summer house. She said: "It is on the third floor," and we followed her to the second. The stairway to the third was closed off by a door which Mrs. Bastone unlocked. It was the usual attic stairway, narrow and steep, and without a handrail. Aunt Mimi, who was somewhat plump and definitely short-legged, had to take hold of my arm.

By the time she had wheezed up, Mrs. Bastone had already gone to the

far corner of the big, unplastered attic jammed with chairs, marble-top tables, old bureaus, doll houses, picture frames, trunks and suitcases, the memoirs, the incubi, of the attic. We stood there helplessly, blinking like poor owls, neither of us offering to aid. At last she said: "Will you come over?" We did. She had unlocked a great square wooden box that looked as if it were filled with old dresses and woolens wrapped in newspaper. This was, of course, not so. The clothes on top were a decoy, a camouflage. When she had removed them we saw, swathed in paper, as a mummy is swathed in linen, the bulk of some large object. But there were then, two, for first she was lifting out a small thing and when she had unclothed it we saw that it was a little bust and that here was Mrs. Bastone as she had first seemed to me—the unarmed smile, the sweet clarity of the features, the delicate droop of the head—all done in some manner imitative of a more childish time: that was it. It was fragrant but not original. The artist had been under some constraint. There had been the effort, as it were, not to break the mask. I was glad at least to see that Mrs. Bastone had not been turned into a Madonna. No! What one saw was the mannered face of a young woman who has not been forced in any way to become individual.

"Why, this is all you!" Aunt Mimi said, stooping tenderly to stare into the empty eyes of the bust.

"Oh," said Mrs. Bastone tensely, "she didn't like it. She said it wasn't me."

"Why, how foolish! It's you to a T!"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Bastone. "You think so!" Her face was tyrannically beset.

"Why, your friend——" my aunt began.

Mrs. Bastone said, "Wait!" and began uncovering what remained in the box.

Watching her was very painful. I felt as if some fearful resurrection were going on. And what we saw at last, before the final covering was removed, cowered in the box like an animal.

And what we saw, when it was finally bare, was something obsessively conceived, obsessively executed by the obsession. Staring white, grainless stone all curled upon itself—our innocent Daphne restored to us, encoiled in branches, one hand already leaves! The body lay crouched on its side, the legs drawn up, a serpent tension in the neck, the hand that had not yet become leaves curled piteously. Leaves were already over the body in coils that seemed to be tightened around it. The head was averted, shrink-

ing from its own nature. The mouth was open like the mouth of a fury. Edges, as at the slanted upper eyelids cast over the pupils, which, however, stared madly forth, were sharply cut, and through them I felt, though I could not actually see in the poor overhead light, the transparency of the—stone? No—soul. Some indefinable horror struggled here, some mask more living than its original, shrinking, recoiling, from its change.

What had Nina Lehman done? The ruthless intention of the artist had been achieved! But what had she done? For some perception was burning like an acid on us all. What we saw was too living to be seen. I mean the madness which with a madness of honesty had not spared Rosemary Bastone. For we recognized all of her features in those of the wounded Daphne.

Did actually this object convey so many ideas? But it conveyed the emotion which radically drives the mind to harsh and terrible images. What I saw exposed was all I had dared not think. The blight, the blight, of the beautiful life! The blight, the blight, of never changing, of so resisting change that resistance becomes that captivity, where all that one has not been is haunted, is killed, is bled invisibly, with constancy, by all that one is but should not be. Thus in the effort to avoid pain one has created more pain. Thus in the effort to avert change one creates a ghastly change. The fear of being human, the fear of moving with life, thus creating this monstrosity that dies between two worlds.

All this while neither my aunt nor I had said a word. I do not know what she felt, but I think she was shocked. And it suddenly struck me that her little drama, her play which had been Rosemary Bastone's real life, was now too real for her. Life had spoiled all her conjectures. Her "story" was ended. She had gone off on all the wrong tangents. The center was here, which she had never guessed. It was not so easy to rescue someone from herself.

We had been looking at this over and over again, or we had just been looking once in one glance that seemed to stay and stop us forever. No one was studying Mrs. Bastone now. It was what had been done with her that we were studying, and when finally her voice, ringing sharply with a high, plain pain, broke in on us, it was also shocking.

"Why did she do this?"

Neither of us looked at her.

She said with horror: "I dream about it!"

My aunt, too confused, could not speak.

Her voice cried: "I thought she would help me!"

My aunt echoed: "Help you?"

"Everyone thought so. Even Mother."

"Help you?"

"Why did she do it? Why would anyone do a thing like this?"

My aunt said mechanically: "Your mother didn't like her, did she?"

"Oh, no. She thought she would help me."

"Help you?"

"Oh," Mrs. Bastone said, "everybody thinks something is wrong with me. Even Mother."

Then my aunt recovered herself. She stepped forward and said with a kind of galvanic grimace: "There's nothing wrong with you, Rosemary. It's your mother who's wrong. She's very wrong. You ought to know that, Rosemary. For your own sake you ought to know that."

But Mrs. Bastone drew back and fully faced my aunt and stared at her, and as she stared the pupils became immensely dilated so that the blue was almost all gone and what you saw was the dark glass of revelation. And she stared until she had said: "Then you are not my friend, not my friend either!" And she might have gone on speaking, but suddenly, at a sound below, her head snapped to her breast. She had begun crying again, but this time harshly.

We heard, then, steps and Mrs. Hazard's voice a moment later crying out: "Why, Rosemary!" but by this time she was midway up the stairs and could see us.

And Mrs. Bastone, who had covered her face with her hands, ran weeping to her mother, and her mother, with a terrible face, rigid and ashen, composed as if a hurricane would strike her down, with a gesture like an old queen, took her in her arms.

# *NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS*

HILDE ABEL, of New York, is the author of *Victory Was Slain,* a novel, and the novelette *The Bus That Had No Sign* which appeared in *Cross Section 1945.* Her short novel, *The Lake,* intended originally for publication in the present book, was released to Dodd, Mead for separate publication early in 1947.

NELSON ALGREN was born in Detroit but writes out of Chicago. He is the author of two novels, *Somebody in Boots* and *Never Come Morning.* His short stories have appeared in *Harper's Bazaar, American Mercury, New Masses* and other magazines, and in the O'Brien and O. Henry annuals; a collection of them will be published early in 1947.

BETTY BAUR is the author of two novels—*The White Queen* and *This Is Goodbye.* Her stories have appeared in *Collier's, The American Magazine* and in *Cross Section* (1944). She lives in Darien, Connecticut.

BOGART CARLAW, of New York, served with the OSS. He is the author of *Giants Should Be Gelded*—a novel, and several short stories.

EDITH CONKLIN lives in New York. Other of her poems have been published in the *Yale Poetry Review* and in *Experiment.*

MARY HOWARD CONSTABLE is a twenty-five-year-old New Englander now living in Chicago. Her poems have been published in *Poetry, Common Ground* and other magazines.

FRANCIS C. COOK lives in Demorest, Georgia. He has published in *The Atlantic Monthly* and other magazines.

JAMES COX lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The story in the present book is his first published work.

DAVID CORNEL DE JONG, of Providence, Rhode Island, is the author of a number of novels, several books of poems, an autobiography and many short stories. His most recent novel was *Somewhat Angels* and a collection of his stories, *Snow-on-the-Mountain,* was published in the fall of 1946.

PRUDENCIO DE PEREDA has had stories in the two previous issues of *Cross Section;* also in *Story, New Republic, Twice a Year, New Masses* and other periodicals, as well as in the O'Brien and O. Henry annuals.

ALAN DUGAN lives in New York and has had poems published in *Poetry* and in *Pulse.*

LEONARD EHRLICH is the author of *God's Angry Man.* His long awaited second novel, *The Free and the Lonely,* will be published this year.

SAM ELKIN lives in New York. He is the author of *The Ballplayer,* a short story which aroused considerable interest when it was published in *Cross Section 1945.* He has also contributed to *Harper's Magazine* and a number of the little magazines.

WAYNE ELLSON, of Brooklyn, has contributed short stories to *Story, Direction* and other magazines. He was represented in the O'Brien annual for 1939.

RICHARD W. ERICKSON lives in Preston, Washington. The story in this issue of *Cross Section* is his first published work.

CHARLES A. FENTON spent four years with the Royal Canadian Air Force. He was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1919, lives in Norwalk, Connecticut, and has had stories published in *Adventure Magazine* and, in England, in *Penguin Parade.*

VINCENT FERRINI, of Lynn, Massachusetts, is the author of five books of poems: *No Smoke* (Falmouth House), *Injunction* and *Blood on the Tenement* (Sand Piper Publishers), *Tidal Wave* (Great Concord Publishers) and *The Plow in the Ruins* (James A. Decker Press).

MORTON FINEMAN was born in Cleveland, but now lives in Philadelphia. He contributed short stories to both the first *Cross Section* and *Cross Section 1945*. His stories have been published in *Accent, Harper's Bazaar, Story* and other magazines, and have been reprinted in both the O'Brien and O. Henry annuals. He is presently completing work on his first novel.

JEAN GARRIGUE lives in New York. She was a winner of the 1944 short story contest sponsored by Doubleday Doran and *Kenyon Review*. She was one of the *Five Young Poets* published by New Directions and her book of poems, *The Egg and the Centaur,* was recently published by the same press.

WILL GIBSON, of Topeka, Kansas, won the Harriet Monroe Lyric Prize for 1945 awarded by *Poetry*. He has also contributed poems to *Harper's Bazaar, Esquire* and other magazines, as well as to *Cross Section* (1944) and *Mid Country,* an anthology of Middle West writing.

DON GIFFORD lives in New York. The poems in the present book are his first published work.

OLIVER HALE was a contributor to the *American Caravan* and has also appeared in *Poetry*. He lives in New York.

ROBERT E. HAYDEN is a teaching fellow in the English Department of the University of Michigan. His poems have appeared in *Poetry* and in *Cross Section 1945;* his first book of verse, *Heartshape in the Dust,* was published by the Falcon Press in Detroit.

BASIL HEATTER lives in Connecticut, and the story in *Cross Section* is his first to be published. He was an officer in the PT service and was wounded and decorated in the Southwest Pacific. His first novel, *The Dim View,* was published in the fall of 1946, and he has another scheduled for 1947.

HAMLEN HUNT, of Boston, has published stories in *Collier's, McCall's, Woman's Home Companion, New Masses, Story* and other magazines, and has also been represented in the O. Henry annuals.

JAMES TURNER JACKSON lives in Muskegon, Michigan. *Blue Aerial* is his first published story. He is now completing work on his first novel, *Red Grass,* to be published in 1947.

GEORGE W. JOHN comes from Milwaukee and is a student at St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland. His poems in this book are his first published work.

A. M. KRICH, who lives in New York, is presently at work on a long poem, *Dr. Jekyll Talks to Mr. Hyde.* His poems have been published in *The Anvil, New Masses, New Mexico Quarterly Review* and other magazines.

MERIDEL LESUEUR lives in South Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is the author of *North Star Country,* and her short stories have appeared in the O'Brien and O. Henry annuals. She has a novel and book of stories scheduled for early publication.

ROBERT LOWRY is twenty-seven years old, was born in Cincinnati and lives in Brooklyn. He served in the U. S. Army in Africa and Italy. He has contributed short stories to *Mademoiselle, Story* and other magazines and to *New Directions 9.* His first novel, *Casualty,* was published recently; his second, *The Big Cage,* will be published in the spring of 1947.

WILLIAM MARCH is the author of two novels, *Company K* and *The Looking Glass,* and of many distinguished short stories. A representative collection of Mr. March's stories may be found in his most recent book, *Trial Balance.*

JANE MAYHALL, of New York, was a contributor to *Cross Section 1945.* Her poems have also been published in *Partisan Review, Sewanee Review, Accent* and other magazines.

THOMAS McGRATH, who lives in New York, is the author of a book of poems, *First Manifesto* (Swallow Press); his *Dialectics of Love*

was published in *Three Young Poets* (James A. Decker Press). His poems have appeared in *Poetry, New Masses* and other magazines.

HENRY C. MEYER lives in New Rochelle, New York. The story in this issue of *Cross Section* is his first to be published. He is presently at work on a novel.

TERRY MORRIS also lives in New Rochelle, New York. She is the author of *No Hiding Place,* a novel, and is now at work on her second novel.

ELLEN NIELSEN has contributed short stories to *The Midland, American Prefaces* and *The American Scandinavian Review.* She lives in Fresno, California.

HAROLD NORSE lives in New York and has contributed poetry to *Accent, Poetry* and other magazines.

RALPH PETERSON, of Madison, Wisconsin, is a former country editor. He has a novel, *The Age of the Brass Pigeon,* scheduled for early publication, and also a collection of stories, *The Savage Time.*

ANN PETRY lives in New York. She is the author of *The Street,* a novel.

J. F. POWERS lives in Avon, Minnesota, but considers Chicago his home. His stories have appeared in *Accent, Commonweal, Opportunity* and other magazines, and also in a number of anthologies, including the *O. Henry Memorial Prize Stories* and *Best American Short Stories.* A collection of his stories, *Prince of Darkness and Other Stories,* will be published in 1947.

CONSTANCE PULTZ lives in Brooklyn and is working on her first novel. She was a contributor to *Cross Section 1945* and has had stories in *Mademoiselle* and *Seventeen.*

HUGH ROCKWELL lives in Robinhood, Maine. He is represented in the present book by his first published work.

COLEMAN ROSENBERGER is a Virginia lawyer. He was a contributor to *Cross Section 1945* and is preparing an anthology of writings by Virginians about Virginia from Captain John Smith to Ellen Glasgow.

TEO SAVORY came here from England several years ago and now lives in New York. She is working on her first novel.

JO SINCLAIR lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Her novel, *Wasteland,* won the Harper Prize Award. She has contributed to *Esquire, Coronet, Harper's* and other magazines.

MARJORIE STENGEL lives in New York. She was a contributor to the first *Cross Section* and her stories have appeared in several magazines.

GEORGE STURTEVANT lives in Bloomfield, New Jersey, and served four years with the U. S. Army. This is his first story to be published.

GEORGE H. TAYLOR lives in Boothbay, Maine. The story in this issue of *Cross Section* is his first published work.

BELLE TURNBULL has contributed poems to *Poetry, Saturday Review of Literature, Midland* and other magazines, and is the author of one book—*Goldboat.* She lives in Breckenridge, Colorado.

BYRON VAZAKAS is the author of a recently published book of poems, *Transfigured Night.* He has published poetry in many literary magazines and his work has appeared in *American Writing* and other anthologies.

ELEANOR WELLS is a resident of New York. Her poems have appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly, The New Yorker, The New Republic* and other magazines.

THEODORE WILSON is represented by his first published work. He lives in Denver, Colorado.